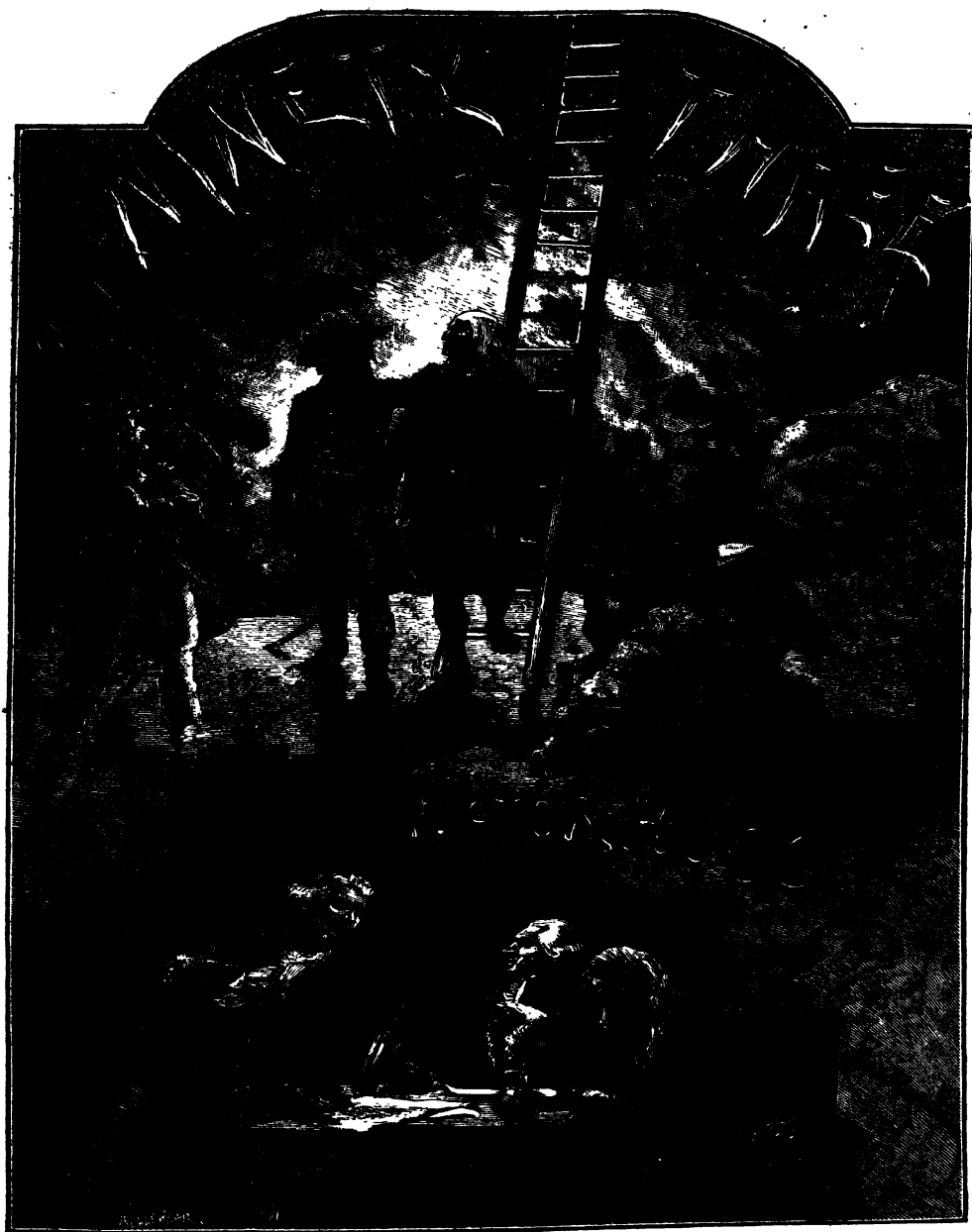


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NOT TO BE LENT OUT

NINETY-THREE

BY

VICTOR HUGO

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DESIGNS BY VICTOR HUGO, BAYARD, BRION,
VIERGE, AND OTHER EMINENT FRENCH ARTISTS*

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

LONDON AND NEW-YORK

1889

*By the Same Author,
In Uniform Style.*

LES MISÉRABLES, 5 VOLS.
TOILERS OF THE SEA, . . . 2 VOLS.
NÔTRE-DAME, 2 VOLS.
THE MAN WHO LAUGHS, . 2 VOLS.
NINETY-THREE, 2 VOLS.

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS,
LONDON AND NEW-YORK.

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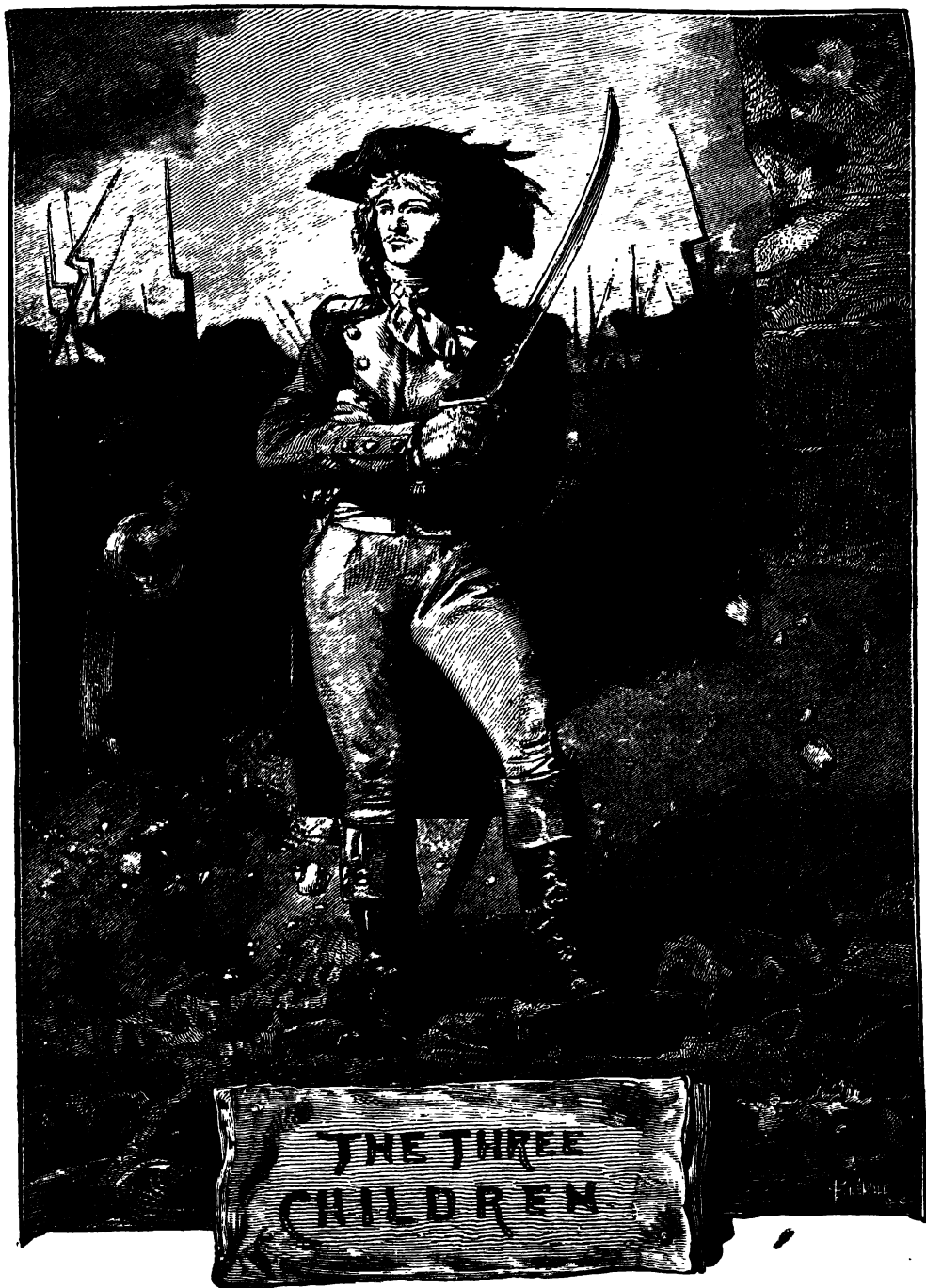


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WHEN THE SUN ROSE.

NINETY-THREE

BOOK II

THE THREE CHILDREN.

CHAPTER I

PLUSQUAM CIVILIA BELLA



THE summer of 1792 had been very rainy; the summer of 1793 was dry and hot. In consequence of the civil war, there were no roads left, so to speak, in Brittany. Still it was possible to get about, thanks to the beauty of the season. Dry fields make an easy route.

At the close of a lively July day, about an hour before sunset, a man on horseback, who came from the direction of Avranches, drew rein before the little inn called the Croix-Branchard, which stood at the entrance of Pontorson, and which for years past had borne this inscription on its sign—"Good cider on draft." It had been warm all day, but the wind was beginning now to rise.

The traveler was enveloped in an ample cloak which covered the back of his horse. He wore a broad hat with a tricolored cockade, which was a sufficiently bold thing to do in this country of hedges and gunshots, where a cockade was a target. The cloak, fastened about his

neck, was thrown back to leave his arms free, and beneath glimpses could be had of a tricolored sash and two pistols thrust in it. A sabre hung down below the cloak.

At the sound of the horse's hoofs the door of the inn opened and the landlord appeared, a lantern in his hand. It was the intermediate hour between day and night; still light along the highway, but dark in the house. The host looked at the cockade.

"Citizen," said he, "do you stop here?"

"No."

"Where are you going, then?"

"To Dol."

"In that case go back to Avranches or remain at Pontorson."

"Why?"

"Because there is fighting at Dol."

"Ah!" said the horseman.

Then he added:

"Give my horse some oats."

The host brought the trough, emptied a measure of oats into it, and took the bridle off the horse, which began to snuff and eat.

The dialogue continued:

"Citizen, has that horse been seized?"

"No."

"It belongs to you?"

"Yes. I bought and paid for it."

"Where do you come from?"

"Paris."

"Not direct?"

"No."

"I should think not! The roads are closed. But the post runs still."

"As far as Alençon. I left it there."

"Ah! Very soon there will be no longer any posts in France. There are no more horses. A horse worth three hundred livres costs six hundred, and fodder is beyond all price. I have been postmaster, and now I am keeper of a cookshop. Out of thirteen hundred and thirteen postmasters that there used to be, two hundred have resigned. Citizen, you traveled according to the new tariff?"

"That of the 1st of May—yes."

"Twenty sous a post for a carriage, twelve for a gig, five sous for a van. You bought your horse at Alençon?"

"Yes."

"You have ridden all day?"

"Since dawn."

"And yesterday?"

"And the day before."

"I can see that. You came by Domfront and Mortain."

"And Avranches."

"Take my advice, citizen; rest yourself. You must be tired. Your horse is certainly."

"Horses have a right to be tired; men have not."



The host again fixed his eyes on the traveler. It was a grave, calm, severe face, framed by gray hair.

The innkeeper cast a glance along the road, which was deserted as far as the eye could reach, and said:

"And you travel alone in this fashion?"

"I have an escort."

"Where is it?"

"My sabre and pistols."

The innkeeper brought a bucket of water, and, while the horse was drinking, studied the traveler, and said mentally—"All the same, he has the look of a priest."

The horseman resumed:

"You say there is fighting at Dol?"

"Yes. That ought to be about beginning."

"Who is fighting?"

"One *ci-devant* against another *ci-devant*."

"You said——"

"I say that an *ex-noble* who is for the Republic is fighting against another *ex-noble* who is for the King."

"But there is no longer a king."

"There is the little fellow! The odd part of the business is that these two *ci-devants* are relations."

The horseman listened attentively. The innkeeper continued:

"One is young, the other old. It is the grand-nephew who fights the great-uncle. The uncle is a Royalist, the nephew a patriot. The uncle commands the Whites, the nephew commands the Blues. Ah, they will show no quarter, I'll warrant you. It is a war to the death."

"Death?"

"Yes, citizen. Hold! would you like to see the compliments they fling at each other's heads? Here is a notice the old man finds means to placard everywhere, on all the houses and all the trees, and that he has had stuck up on my very door."

The host held up his lantern to a square of paper fastened on a panel of the double door, and, as the placard was written in large characters, the traveler could read it as he sat on his horse:

"The Marquis de Lantenac has the honor of informing his grand-nephew, the Viscount Gauvain, that, if the Marquis has the good fortune to seize his person, he will cause the Viscount to be decently shot."

"Here," added the host, "is the reply."

He went forward, and threw the light of the lantern upon a second placard placed on a level with the first upon the other leaf of the door. The traveler read:

"Gauvain warns Lantenac that, if he take him, he will have him shot."

"Yesterday," said the host, "the first placard was stuck on my door, and this morning the second. There was no waiting for the answer."

The traveler in a half-voice, and as if speaking to himself, uttered these words, which the innkeeper heard without really comprehending:

"Yes; this is more than war in the country—it is war in families. It is necessary, and it is well. The grand restoration of the people must be bought at this price."

And the traveler raised his hand to his hat and saluted the second placard, on which his eyes were still fixed.

The host continued:

"So, citizen, you understand how the matter lies. In the cities and the large towns we are for the Revolution, in the country they are against it; that is to say, in the towns people are Frenchmen, and in the villages they are Bretons. It is a war of the townspeople against the peasants. They call us clowns, we call them boors. The nobles and the priests are with them."

"Not all," interrupted the horseman.

"Certainly not, citizen, since we have here a viscount against a marquis."

Then he added to himself:

"And I feel sure I am speaking to a priest."

The horseman continued:

"And which of the two has the best of it?"

"The viscount so far. But he has to work hard. The old man is a tough one. They belong to the Gauvain family—nobles of these parts. It is a family with two branches: there is the great branch, whose chief is called the Marquis de Lantenac, and there is the lesser branch, whose head is called the Viscount Gauvain. To-day the two branches fight each other. One does not see that among trees, but one sees it among men. This Marquis de Lantenac is all-powerful in Brittany; the peasants consider him a prince. The very day he landed, eight thousand men joined him; in a week, three hundred parishes had risen. If he had been able to get foothold on the coast, the English would have landed. Luckily this Gauvain was at hand—the other's grand-nephew—odd chance! He is the Republican commander, and he has checkmated his grand-uncle. And then, as good luck would have it, when this Lantenac arrived, and was massacring a heap of prisoners, he had two women shot, one of whom had three children that had been adopted by a Paris battalion. And that made a terrible battalion. They call themselves the Battalion of the Bonnet Rouge. There are not many of those Parisians left, but they are furious bayonets. They have been incorporated into the division of Commandant Gauvain. Nothing can stand against them. They mean to avenge the women and retake the children. Nobody knows what the old man has done with the little ones. That is what enraged the Parisian grenadiers. Suppose those babies had not been mixed up in the matter—the war would not be what it is. The viscount is a good, brave young man; but the old fellow is a terrible marquis. The peasants call it the war of Saint Michael against Beelzebub. You know, perhaps, that Saint Michael is an angel of the district. There is a mountain named after him out in the bay. They say he overcame the demon, and buried him under another mountain near here, which is called Tombelaine."

"Yes," murmured the horseman; "Tumba Beleni, the tomb of Belenus—Belus, Bel, Belial, Beelzebub."

"I see that you are well informed."

And the host again spoke to himself:

"He understands Latin! Decidedly he is a priest."

Then he resumed:

"Well, citizen, for the peasants it is that war beginning over again. For them the Royalist general is Saint Michael, and Beelzebub is the Republican commander. But if there is a devil, it is certainly Lantenac, and if there is an angel, it is Gauvain. You will take nothing, citizen?"

"I have my gourd and a bit of bread. But you do not tell me what is passing at Dol!"

"This. Gauvain commands the exploring column of the coast. Lantenac's aim was to rouse a general insurrection, and sustain Lower Brittany by the aid of Lower Normandy, open the door to Pitt, and give a shove forward to the Vendean army, with twenty thousand English, and two hundred thousand peasants. Gauvain cut this plan short. He holds the coast, and he drives Lantenac into the interior and the English into the sea. Lantenac was here, and Gauvain has dislodged him; has taken from him the Pont-au-Beau, has driven him out of Avranches, chased him out of Villedieu, and kept him from reaching Granville. He is manœuvring to shut him up again in the forest of Fougères, and to surround him. Yesterday every thing was going well; Gauvain was here with his division. All of a sudden—an alarm!—the old man, who is skillful, made a point; information comes that he has marched on Dol. If he take Dol, and establishes a battery on Mount Dol (for he has cannon), then there will be a place on the coast where the English can land, and every thing is lost. That is why, as there was not a minute to lose, that Gauvain, who is a man with a head, took counsel with nobody but himself, asked no orders and waited for none, but sounded the signal to saddle, put to his artillery, collected his troop, drew his sabre, and, while Lantenac throws himself on Dol, Gauvain throws himself on Lantenac. It is at Dol that these two Breton heads will knock together. There will be a fine shock. They are at it now."

"How long does it take to get to Dol?"

"At least three hours for a troop with cannon; but they are there now."

The traveler listened, and said:

"In fact, I think I hear cannon."

The host listened.

"Yes, citizen; and the musketry. They have opened the ball. You

would do well to pass the night here. There will be nothing good to catch over there."

"I can not stop. I must keep on my road."

"You are wrong. I do not know your business; but the risk is great, and unless it concern what you hold dearest in the world——"

"In truth, it is that which is concerned," said the cavalier.

"Something like your son——"

"Very nearly that," said the cavalier.

The innkeeper raised his head, and said to himself:

"Still this citizen gives me the impression of being a priest."

Then, after a little reflection:

"All the same, a priest may have children."

"Put the bridle back on my horse," said the traveler. "How much do I owe you?"

He paid the man.

The host set the trough and the bucket back against the wall and returned toward the horseman.

"Since you are determined to go, listen to my advice. It is clear that you are going to Saint-Malo. Well, do not pass by Dol. There are two roads; the road by Dol, and the road along the sea-shore. There is scarcely any difference in their length. The sea-shore road passes by Saint-Georges-de-Brehaigne, Cherrucix, and Hirèlle-Vivier. You leave Dol to the south and Cancale to the north. Citizen, at the end of the street you will find the branching off of the two routes; that of Dol is on the left, that of Saint-Georges-de-Brehaigne on the right. Listen well to me; if you go by Dol, you will fall into the middle of the massacre. That is why you must not take to the left, but to the right."

"Thanks," said the traveler.

He spurred his horse forward. The obscurity was now complete; he hurried on into the night. The innkeeper lost sight of him.

When the traveler reached the end of the street where the two roads branched off, he heard the voice of the innkeeper calling to him from afar:

"Take the right!"

He took the left.

CHAPTER II

DOL

DOL, a Spanish city of France in Brittany, as the guide-books style it, is not a town—it is a street. A great old Gothic street, bordered all the way on the right and the left by houses with pillars, placed irregularly, so that they form nooks and elbows in the highway, which is nevertheless very wide. The rest of the town is only a network of lanes, attaching themselves to this great diametrical street, and pouring into it like brooks into a river. The city, without gates or walls, open, overlooked by Mount Dol, could not have sustained a siege, but the street might have sustained one. The promontories of houses, which were still to be seen fifty years back, and the two-pillared galleries which bordered the street, made a battle-ground that was very strong and capable of offering great resistance. Each house was a fortress in fact, and it would be necessary to take them one after another. The old market was very nearly in the middle of the street.

The innkeeper of the Croix-Branchard had spoken truly—a mad conflict filled Dol at the moment he uttered the words. A nocturnal duel between the Whites, that morning arrived, and the Blues, who had come upon them in the evening, burst suddenly over the town. The forces were unequal; the Whites numbered six thousand—there were only fifteen hundred of the Blues; but there was equality in point of obstinate rage. Strange to say, it was the fifteen hundred who had attacked the six thousand.

On one side a mob, on the other a phalanx. On one side six thousand peasants, with blessed medals on their leather vests, white ribbons on their round hats, Christian devices on their braces, chaplets at their belts, carrying more pitchforks than sabres, carbines without bayonets, dragging cannon with ropes; badly equipped, ill disciplined, poorly

armed, but frantic. In opposition to them were fifteen hundred soldiers, wearing three-cornered hats, coats with large tails and wide lapels, shoulder-belts crossed, copper-hilted swords, and carrying guns with long bayonets. They were trained, skilled; docile, yet fierce; obeying like men who would know how to command. Volunteers also, shoeless



and in rags too, but volunteers for their country. On the side of Monarchy, peasants who were paladins; for the Revolution, barefooted heroes, and each troop possessing a soul in its leader; the Royalists having an old man, the Republicans a young one. On this side, Lantenac; on the other, Gauvain.

The Revolution, side by side with its faces of youthful giants like those of Danton, Saint-Just, and Robespierre, has faces of ideal youth, like those of Hoche and Marceau. Gauvain was one of these.

He was thirty years old; he had a Herculean bust, the solemn eye of a prophet, and the laugh of a child. He did not smoke, he did not drink, he did not swear. He carried a dressing-case through the whole war; he took care of his nails, his teeth, and his hair, which was dark and luxuriant. During halts he himself shook in the wind his military coat, riddled with bullets and white with dust. Though always rushing headlong into an affray, he had never been wounded. His singularly sweet voice had at command the abrupt imperiousness needed by a leader. He set the example of sleeping on the ground, in the wind, the rain, and the snow, rolled in his cloak and with his noble head pillowed on a stone. His was a heroic and innocent soul. The sabre in his hand transfigured him. He had that effeminate air which in battle turns into something formidable.

With all that, a thinker and a philosopher—a youthful sage. Alcibiades in appearance, Socrates in speech.

In that immense improvisation of the French Revolution this young man had become at once a leader.

His division, formed by himself, was like a Roman legion, a kind of complete little army; it was composed of infantry and cavalry; it had its scouts, its pioneers, its sappers, pontoniers; and as a Roman legion had its catapults, this one had its cannon. Three pieces, well mounted, rendered the column strong, while leaving it easy to guide.

Lantenac was also a thorough soldier—a more consummate one. He was at the same time wary and hardy. Old heroes have more cold determination than young ones, because they are far removed from the warmth of life's morning; more audacity, because they are near death. What have they to lose? So very little. Hence the manœuvres of Lantenac were at once rash and skillful. But in the main, and almost always, in this dogged hand-to-hand conflict between the old man and the young, Gauvain gained the advantage. It was rather the work of fortune than any thing else. All good luck—even successes which are in themselves terrible—go to youth. Victory is somewhat of a woman.

Lantenac was exasperated against Gauvain; justly, because Gauvain fought against him; in the second place, because he was of his kindred. What did he mean by turning Jacobin? This Gauvain! This mischievous dog! His heir—for the marquis had no children—his grand-nephew, almost his grandson. "*Ah,*" said this quasi-grandfather, "*if I put my hand on him, I will kill him like a dog!*"

For that matter, the Revolution was right to disquiet itself in regard to this Marquis de Lantenac. An earthquake followed his landing. His name spread through the Vendean insurrection like a train of powder, and Lantenac at once became the centre. In a revolt of that

nature, where each is jealous of the other, and each has his thicket or ravine, the arrival of a superior rallies the scattered leaders who have been equals among themselves. Nearly all the forest captains had joined Lantenac, and, whether near or far off, they obeyed him. One man alone had departed; it was the first who had joined him—Gavard. Wherefore? Because he had been a man of trust. Gavard had known all the secrets and adopted all the plans of the ancient system of civil war; Lantenac appeared to replace and supplant him. One does not inherit from a man of trust; the shoe of La Ronain did not fit Lantenac. Gavard departed to join Bonchamp.

Lantenac, as a military man, belonged to the school of Frederick II.; he understood combining the great war with the little. He would have neither a "confused mass," like the great Catholic and royal army, a crowd destined to be crushed, nor a troop of guerrillas scattered among the hedges and copses, good to harass, impotent to destroy. Guerrilla warfare finishes nothing, or finishes ill; it begins by attacking a republic and ends by rifling a diligence. Lantenac did not comprehend this Breton war as the other chiefs had done; neither as La Rochejacquelein, who was all for open country campaigns, nor as Jean Chouan, all for the forest; he would have neither Vendée nor Chouannerie; he wanted real warfare; he would make use of the peasant, but he meant to depend on the soldier. He wanted bands for strategy and regiments for tactics. He found these village armies admirable for attack, for ambush and surprise, quickly gathered, quickly dispersed; but he felt that they lacked solidity; they were like water in his hand; he wanted to create a solid base in this floating and diffused war; he wanted to join to the savage army of the forests regularly drilled troops that would make a pivot about which he could manœuvre the peasants. It was a profound and terrible conception; if it had succeeded, the Vendée would have been unconquerable.

But where to find regular troops? Where look for soldiers? Where seek for regiments? Where discover an army ready made? In England. Hence Lantenac's determined idea—to land the English. Thus the conscience of parties compromises with itself. The white cockade hid the red uniform from Lantenac's sight. He had only one thought—to get possession of some point on the coast and deliver it up to Pitt. That was why, seeing Dol defenseless, he flung himself upon it; the taking of the town would give him Mount Dol, and Mount Dol the coast.

The place was well chosen. The cannon of Mount Dol would sweep the Fresnois on one side and Saint-Brelade on the other; would keep the cruisers of Cancale at a distance, and leave the whole beach,

from Raz-sur-Couesnon to Saint-Méloir-des-Oudes, clear for an invasion.

For the carrying out of this decisive attempt, Lantenac had brought with him only a little over six thousand men, the flower of the bands which he had at his disposal, and all his artillery—ten sixteen-pound culverins, a demi-culverin, and a four-pounder. His idea was to establish a strong battery on Mount Dol, upon the principle that a thousand shots fired from ten cannon do more execution than fifteen hundred fired with five.

Success appeared certain. They were six thousand men. Toward Avranches, they had only Gauvain and his fifteen hundred men to fear, and Léchelle in the direction of Dinan. It was true that Léchelle had twenty-five thousand men, but he was twenty leagues away. So Lantenac felt confidence; on Léchelle's side he put the great distance against the great numbers; with Gauvain, the size of the force against their propinquity. Let us add that Léchelle was an idiot, who later on allowed his twenty-five thousand men to be exterminated in the *landes* of the Croix-Bataille, a blunder which he atoned for by suicide.

So Lantenac felt perfect security. His entrance into Dol was sudden and stern. The Marquis de Lantenac had a stern reputation; he was known to be without pity. No resistance was attempted. The terrified inhabitants barricaded themselves in their houses. The six thousand Vendéans installed themselves in the town with rustic confusion; it was almost like a fair-ground, without quartermasters, without allotted camp, bivouacking at hazard, cooking in the open air, scattering themselves among the churches, forsaking their guns for their rosaries. Lantenac went in haste with some artillery officers to reconnoitre Mount Dol, leaving the command to Gouge-le-Bruant, whom he had appointed field-sergeant.

This Gouge-le-Bruant has left a vague trace in history. He had two nicknames, *Brise-bleu*, on account of his massacre of patriots, and *Imânus*, because he had in him a something that was indescribably horrible. *Imânus*, derived from *imânis*, is an old bas-Norman word which expresses superhuman ugliness, something almost divine in its awfulness—a demon, a satyr, an ogre. An ancient manuscript says—“*With my two eyes I saw Imânus.*” The old people of the Bocage no longer know to-day who Gouge-le-Bruant was, nor what Brise-bleu signifies; but they know, confusedly, Imânus; Imânus is mingled with the local superstitions. They talk of him still at Trémoré and at Plumaugat, two villages where Gouge-le-Bruant has left the trace of his sinister course. In the Vendée the others were savages; Gouge-le-Bruant was the barbarian. He was a species of Cacique, tattooed with Christian

crosses and *fleur-de-lis*; he had on his face the hideous, almost supernatural glare of a soul which no other human soul resembled. He was infernally brave in combat; atrocious afterward. His was a heart full of tortuous intricacies, capable of all forms of devotion, inclined to all madnesses. Did he reason? Yes; but as serpents crawl—in a twisted fashion. He started from heroism to reach murder. It was impossible to divine whence his resolves came to him—they were sometimes grand from their very monstrosity. He was capable of every possible unexpected horror. His ferocity was epic.

Hence his mysterious nickname—*Imânus*.

The Marquis de Lantenac had confidence in his cruelty.

It was true that Imânus excelled in cruelty, but in strategy and in tactics he was less clever, and perhaps the marquis erred in making him his field-sergeant. However that might be, he left Imânus behind him with instructions to replace him and look after every thing.

Gouge-le-Bruant, a man more of a fighter than a soldier, was fitter to cut the throats of a clan than to guard a town. Still he posted main-guards.

When evening came, as the Marquis de Lantenac was returning toward Dol, after having decided upon the ground for his battery, he suddenly heard the report of cannon. He looked forward. A red smoke was rising from the principal street. There had been surprise, invasion, assault; they were fighting in the town.

Although very difficult to astonish, he was stupefied. He had not been prepared for any thing of the sort. Who could it be? Evidently it was not Gauvain. No man would attack a force that numbered four to his one. Was it Léchelle? But could he have made such a forced march? Léchelle was improbable; Gauvain impossible.

Lantenac urged on his horse; as he rode forward he encountered the flying inhabitants; he questioned them; they were mad with terror; they cried—"The Blues! the Blues!" When he arrived, the situation was a bad one.

This is what had happened.

CHAPTER III

SMALL ARMIES AND GREAT BATTLES



As we have just seen, the peasants, on arriving at Dol, dispersed themselves through the town, each man following his own fancy, as happens when troops "*obey from friendship*"—a favorite expression with the Vendéans—a species of obedience which makes heroes, but not troopers. They thrust the artillery out of the way along with the baggage, under the arches of the old market-hall. They were weary; they ate, drank, counted their rosaries, and lay down pell-mell across the principal street, which was encumbered rather than guarded.

As night came on, the greater portion fell asleep, with their heads on their knapsacks, some having their wives beside them, for the peasant women often followed their husbands, and the robust ones acted as spies. It was a mild July evening; the constellation glittered in the deep purple of the sky. The entire bivouac, which resembled rather the halt of a caravan than an army encamped, gave itself up to repose. Suddenly, amid the dull gleams of twilight, such as had not yet closed their eyes saw three pieces of ordnance pointed at the entrance of the street.

It was Gauvain's artillery. He had surprised the main-guard. He was in the town, and his column held the top of the street.

A peasant started up, cried, "Who goes there?" and fired his musket; a cannon-shot replied. Then a furious discharge of musketry burst forth. The whole drowsy crowd sprang up with a start. A rude shock, to fall asleep under the stars and wake under a volley of grape-shot. The first moments were terrific. There is nothing so tragic as the aimless swarming of a thunderstricken crowd. They flung themselves on their arms. They yelled, they ran; many fell. The assaulted peasants no longer knew what they were about, and blindly shot each

other. The townspeople, stunned with fright, rushed in and out of their houses, and wandered frantically amid the hubbub. Families shrieked to one another. A dismal combat, in which women and children were



mingled. The balls, as they whistled overhead, streaked the darkness with rays of light. A fusillade poured from every dark corner. There was nothing but smoke and tumult. The entanglement of the baggage-wagons and the cannon-carriages was added to the confusion. The

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horses became unmanageable. The wounded were trampled under foot. The groans of the poor wretches, helpless on the ground, filled the air. Horror here—stupefaction there. Soldiers and officers sought for one another. In the midst of all this could be seen creatures made indifferent to the awful scene by personal preoccupations. A woman sat nursing her new-born babe, seated on a bit of wall, against which her husband leaned with his leg broken; and he, while his blood was flowing, tranquilly loaded his rifle and fired at random, straight before him into the darkness. Men lying flat on the ground fired across the spokes of the wagon-wheels. At moments there rose a hideous din of clamors, then the great voices of the cannon drowned all. It was awful.

It was like a felling of trees; they dropped one upon another. Gauvain poured out a deadly fire from his ambush, and suffered little loss.

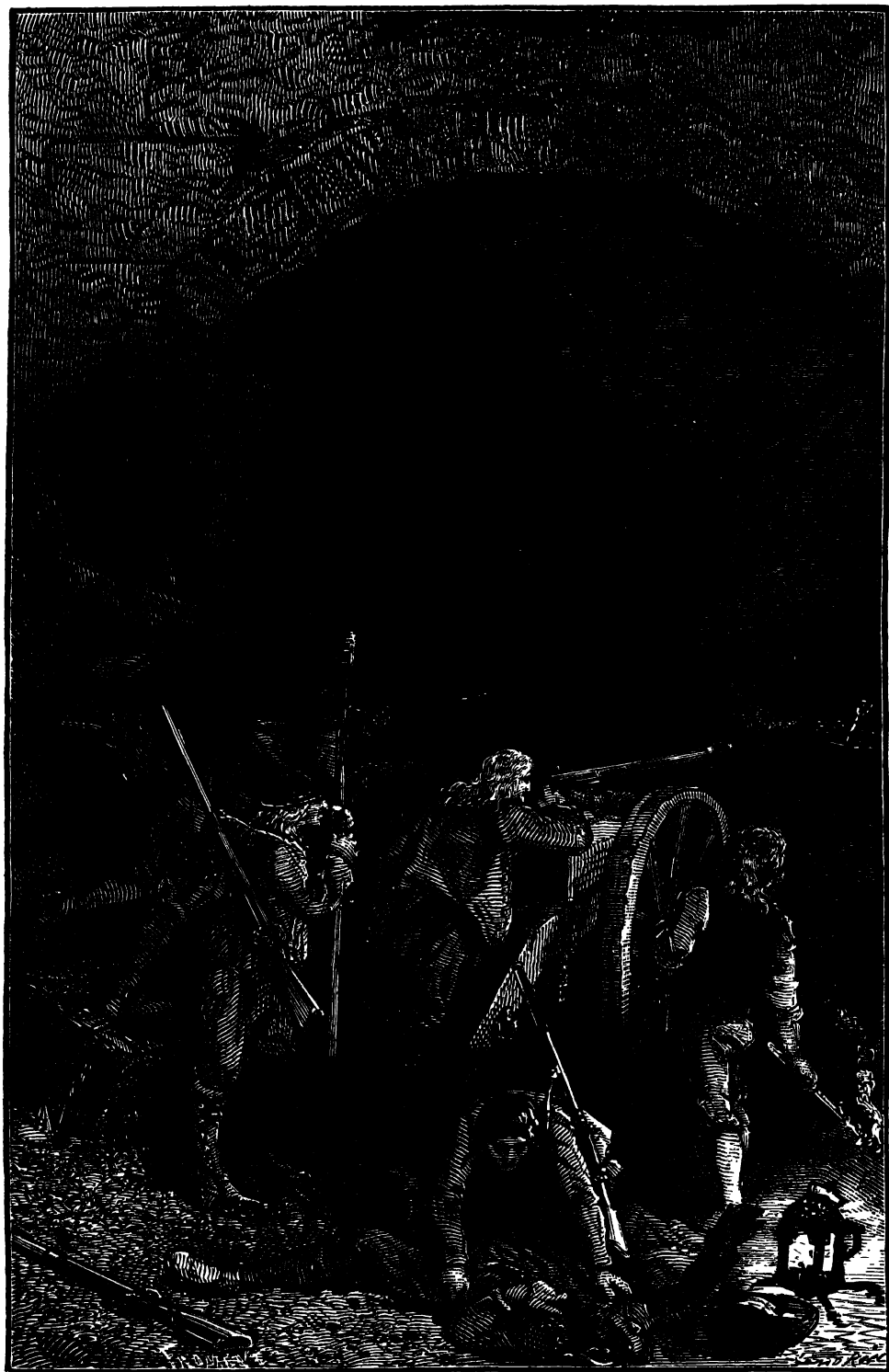
Still the peasants, courageous amid their disorder, ended by putting themselves on the defensive; they retreated into the market—a vast, obscure redoubt, a forest of stone pillars. There they again made a stand; any thing which resembled a wood gave them confidence. Imânus supplied the absence of Lantenac as best he could. They had cannon, but, to the great astonishment of Gauvain, they did not make use of it; that was owing to the fact that the artillery officers had gone with the marquis to reconnoitre Mount Dol, and the peasants did not know how to manage the culverins and demi-culverins; but they riddled with balls the Blues who cannonaded them. They replied to the grape-shot by volleys of musketry. It was now they who were sheltered. They had heaped together the drays, the tumbrils, the casks, all the litter of the old market, and improvised a lofty barricade, with openings through which they could pass their carbines. From these holes their fusillade was murderous. The whole was quickly arranged. In a quarter of an hour the market presented an impregnable front.

This became a serious matter for Gauvain. This market suddenly transformed into a citadel was unexpected. The peasants were inside it, massed and solid. Gauvain's surprise had succeeded, but he ran the risk of defeat. He got down from his saddle. He stood attentively studying the darkness, his arms folded, clutching his sword in one hand, erect, in the glare of a torch which lighted his battery.

The gleam, falling on his tall figure, made him visible to the men behind the barricade. He became an aim for them, but he did not notice it.

The shower of balls sent out from the barricade fell about him as he stood there, lost in thought.

But he could oppose cannon to all these carbines, and cannon always



LANTENAC AT THE BATTERY.

ends by getting the advantage. Victory rests with him who has the artillery. His battery, well-manned, insured him the superiority.

Suddenly a lightning-flash burst from the shadowy market; there was a sound like a peal of thunder, and a ball broke through a house above Gauvain's head. The barricade was replying to the cannon with its own voice. What had happened? Something new had occurred. The artillery was no longer confined to one side.

A second ball followed the first and buried itself in the wall close to Gauvain. A third knocked his hat off on the ground.

These balls were of a heavy calibre. It was a sixteen-pounder that fired.

"They are aiming at you, commandant," cried the artillerymen.

They extinguished the torch. Gauvain, as if in a reverie, picked up his hat.

Some one had in fact aimed at Gauvain—it was Lantenac. The marquis had just arrived within the barricade from the opposite side.

Imâmus had hurried to meet him.

"Monseigneur, we are surprised."

"By whom?"

"I do not know."

"Is the route to Dinan free?"

"I think so."

"We must begin a retreat."

"It has commenced. A good many have run away."

"We must not run; we must fall back. Why are you not making use of this artillery?"

"The men lost their heads; besides, the officers were not here."

"I am come."

"Monseigneur, I have sent toward Fougères all I could of the baggage, the women, every thing useless. What is to be done with the three little prisoners?"

"Ah, those children!"

"Yes."

"They are our hostages. Have them taken to La Tourgue."

This said, the marquis rushed to the barricade. With the arrival of the chief the whole face of affairs changed. The barricade was ill-constructed for artillery; there was only room for two cannon; the marquis put in position a couple of sixteen-pounders, for which loopholes were made. As he leaned over one of the guns, watching the enemy's battery through the opening, he perceived Gauvain.

"It is he!" cried the marquis.

Then he took the swab and rammer himself, loaded the piece, sighted it, and fired.

Thrice he aimed at Gauvain and missed. The third time he only succeeded in knocking his hat off.

"Numbskull!" muttered Lantenac; "a little lower, and I should have taken his head."

Suddenly the torch went out, and he had only darkness before him.

"So be it," said he.

Then turning toward the peasant gunners, he cried:

"Now let them have it."

Gauvain, on his side, was not less in earnest. The seriousness of the situation increased. A new phase of the combat developed itself. The barricade had begun to use cannon. Who could tell if it were not about to pass from the defensive to the offensive? He had before him, after deducting the killed and fugitives, at least five thousand combatants, and he had left only twelve hundred serviceable men. What would happen to the Republicans if the enemy perceived their paucity of numbers? The rôles were reversed. He had been the assailant—he would become the assailed. If the barricade were to make a sortie, every thing might be lost.

What was to be done? He could no longer think of attacking the barricade in front; an attempt at main force would be foolhardy; twelve hundred men can not dislodge five thousand. To rush upon them was impossible; to wait would be fatal. He must make an end. But how?

Gauvain belonged to the neighborhood; he was acquainted with the town; he knew that the old market-house where the Vendéans were intrenched was backed by a labyrinth of narrow and crooked streets.

He turned toward his lieutenant, who was that valiant Captain Guéchamp, afterward famous for clearing out the forest of Concise, where Jean Chouan was born, and for preventing the capture of Bourgneuf by holding the dike of La Chaîne against the rebels.

"Guéchamp," said he, "I leave you in command. Fire as fast as you can. Riddle the barricade with cannon-balls. Keep all those fellows over yonder busy."

"I understand," said Guéchamp.

"Mass the whole column with their guns loaded, and hold them ready to make an onslaught."

He added a few words in Guéchamp's ear.

"I hear," said Guéchamp.

Gauvain resumed:

"Are all our drummers on foot?"

"Yes."

"We have nine. Keep two, and give me seven."

The seven drummers ranged themselves in silence in front of Gauvain.

Then he said :

"Battalion of the Bonnet Rouge!"

Twelve men, of whom one was a sergeant, stepped out from the main body of the troop.

"I demand the whole battalion," said Gauvain.

"Here it is," replied the sergeant.

"You are twelve!"

"There are twelve of us left."

"It is well," said Gauvain.

This sergeant was the good, rough trooper Radoub, who had adopted, in the name of the battalion, the three children they had encountered in the wood of La Saudraie.

It will be remembered that only a demi-battalion had been exterminated at Herbe-en-Pail, and Radoub was fortunate enough not to have been among the number.

There was a forage-wagon standing near; Gauvain pointed toward it with his finger.

"Sergeant, order your men to make some straw ropes and twist them about their guns, so that there will be no noise if they knock together."

A minute passed; the order was silently executed in the darkness.

"It is done," said the sergeant.

"Soldiers, take off your shoes," commanded Gauvain.

"We have none," returned the sergeant.

They numbered, counting the drummers, nineteen men; Gauvain made the twentieth.

He cried: "Follow me! Single file! The drummers next to me—the battalion behind them. Sergeant, you will command the battalion."

He put himself at the head of the column, and while the firing on both sides continued, these twenty men, gliding along like shadows, plunged into the deserted lanes. The line marched thus for some time, twisting along the fronts of the houses. The whole town seemed dead; the citizens were hidden in their cellars. Every door was barred; every shutter closed. No light to be seen anywhere.

Amid this silence the principal street kept up its din; the cannon-ading continued; the Republican battery and the Royalist barricade spit forth their volleys with undiminished fury.

After twenty minutes of this tortuous march, Gauvain, who kept

his way unerringly through the darkness, reached the end of a lane which led into the broad street, but on the other side of the market-house.

The position was turned. In this direction there was no intrenchment, according to the eternal imprudence of barricade builders; the market was open and the entrance free among the pillars where some baggage-wagons stood ready to depart. Gauvain and his nineteen men had the five thousand Vendéans before them, but their backs instead of their faces.

Gauvain spoke in a low voice to the sergeant; the soldiers untwisted the straw from their guns; the twelve grenadiers posted themselves in line behind the angle of the lane, and the seven drummers waited with their drumsticks lifted. The artillery firing was intermittent. Suddenly, in a pause between the discharges, Gauvain waved his sword, and cried, in a voice which rang like a trumpet through the silence:

“Two hundred men to the right—two hundred men to the left—all the rest in the centre!”

The twelve muskets fired, and the seven drums beat.

Gauvain uttered the formidable battle-cry of the Blues:

“To your bayonets! Down upon them!”

The effect was prodigious.

This whole peasant mass felt itself surprised in the rear and believed that it had a fresh army at its back. At the same instant, on hearing the drums, the column which Guéchamp commanded at the head of the street began to move, sounding the charge in its turn, and flung itself at a run on the barricade. The peasants found themselves between two fires. Panic magnifies: a pistol-shot sounds like the report of a cannon; in moments of terror the imagination heightens every noise; the barking of a dog sounds like the roar of a lion. Add to this the fact that the peasant catches fright as easily as thatch catches fire, and as quickly as a blazing thatch becomes a conflagration, a panic among peasants becomes a rout. An indescribably confused flight ensued.

In a few instants the market-hall was empty—the terrified rustics broke away in all directions; the officers were powerless; Imânus uselessly killed two or three fugitives; nothing was to be heard but the cry—“*Save yourselves!*” The army poured through the streets of the town like water through the holes of a sieve, and dispersed into the open country with the rapidity of a cloud carried along by a whirlwind. Some fled toward Châteauneuf, some toward Plerguer, others toward Antrain.



GAUVAIN'S ATTACK.

The Marquis de Lantenac watched this stampede. He spiked the guns with his own hands and then retreated—the last of all, slowly, composedly, saying to himself—“Decidedly, the peasants will not stand. We must have the English.”



CHAPTER IV

"IT IS THE SECOND TIME"

THE victory was complete.

Gauvain turned toward the men of the Bonnet Rouge battalion, and said—"You are twelve, but you are equal to a thousand."

Praise from a chief was the cross of honor of those times.

Guéchamp, dispatched beyond the town by Gauvain, pursued the fugitives and captured a great number.

Torches were lighted and the town was searched. All who could not escape surrendered. They illuminated the principal street with fire-pots. It was strewn with dead and dying. The root of a combat must always be torn out; a few desperate groups here and there still resisted; they were surrounded, and threw down their arms.

Gauvain had remarked, amid the frantic pell-mell of the retreat, an intrepid man, a sort of agile and robust form, who protected the flight of others, but had not himself fled. This peasant had used his gun so energetically—the barrel for firing, the butt-end for knocking down—that he had broken it; now he grasped a pistol in one hand and a sabre in the other. No one dared approach him. Suddenly Gauvain saw him reel and support himself against a pillar of the broad street. The man had just been wounded. But he still clutched the sabre and pistol in his fists. Gauvain put his sword under his arm and went up to him.

"Surrender," said he.

The man looked steadily at him. The blood ran through his clothing from a wound which he had received, and made a pool at his feet.

"You are my prisoner," added Gauvain.

The man remained silent.

"What is your name?"

The man answered: "I am called the Shadow-dancer."

"You are a brave man," said Gauvain.

And he held out his hand.

The man cried:

"Long live the King!"

Gathering up all his remaining strength, he raised both arms at



once, fired his pistol at Gauvain's heart, and dealt a blow at his head with the sabre.

He did it with the swiftness of a tiger, but some one else had been still more prompt. This was a man on horseback, who had arrived unobserved a few minutes before. This man, seeing the Vendean raise the sabre and pistol, rushed between him and Gauvain. But for this interposition, Gauvain would have been killed. The horse received the pistol-shot, the man received the sabre-stroke, and both fell. It all happened in the time it would have needed to utter a cry.

The Vendean sank on his side upon the pavement.

The sabre had struck the man full in the face; he lay senseless on the stones. The horse was killed.

Gauvain approached. "Who is this man?" said he.

He studied him. The blood from the gash inundated the wounded man, and spread a red mask over his face. It was impossible to distinguish his features, but one could see that his hair was gray.

"This man has saved my life," continued Gauvain. "Does any one here know him?"



"Commandant," said a soldier, "he came into the town a few minutes ago. I saw him enter; he came by the road from Pontorson."

The chief surgeon hurried up with his instrument-case. The wounded man was still insensible. The surgeon examined him and said:

"A simple gash. It is nothing. It can be sewed up. In eight days he will be on his feet again. It was a beautiful sabre-stroke!"

The sufferer wore a cloak, a tricolored sash, pistols, and a sabre. He was laid on a *littér*. They undressed him. A bucket of fresh water was brought; the surgeon washed the cut; the face began to be visible. Gauvain studied it with profound attention.

"Has he any papers on him?" he asked.

The surgeon felt in the stranger's side-pocket and drew out a pocket-book, which he handed to Gauvain.

The wounded man, restored by the cold water, began to come to himself. His eyelids moved slightly.

Gauvain examined the pocket-book; he found in it a sheet of paper, folded four times; he opened this and read :

"Committee of Public Safety. The Citizen Cimourdain."

He uttered a cry :

"Cimourdain !"

The wounded man opened his eyes at this exclamation.

Gauvain was astounded.

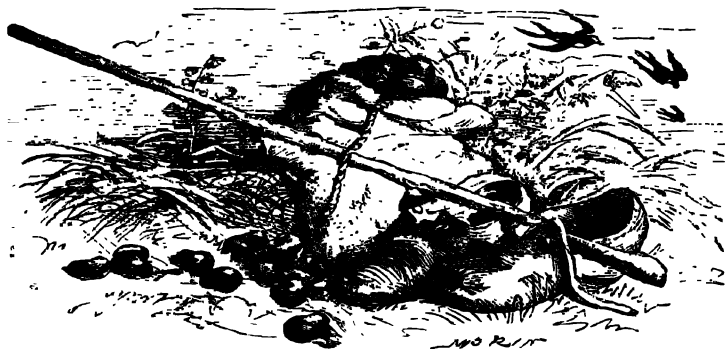
"Cimourdain ! It is you ! This is the second time you have saved my life."

Cimourdain looked at him. A gleam of ineffable joy lighted his bleeding face.

Gauvain fell on his knees beside him, crying :

"My master !"

"Thy father," said Cimourdain.



CHAPTER V

THE DROP OF COLD WATER

THEY had not met for many years, but their hearts had never been parted; they recognized each other as if they had separated the evening before.

An ambulance had been improvised in the town-hall of Dol. Cimourdain was placed on a bed in a little room next the great common chamber of the other wounded. The surgeon sewed up the cut and put an end to the demonstrations of affection between the two men, judging that Cimourdain ought to be left to sleep. Besides, Gauvain was claimed by the thousand occupations which are the duties and cares of victory. Cimourdain remained alone, but he did not sleep: he was consumed by two fevers—that of his wound and that of his joy.

He did not sleep, and still it did not seem to himself that he was awake. Could it be possible that his dream was realized? Cimourdain had long ceased to believe in luck, yet here it was. He had refound Gauvain. He had left him a child, he found him a man; he found him great, formidable, intrepid. He found him triumphant, and triumphing for the people. Gauvain was the real support of the Revolution in Vendée, and it was he, Cimourdain, who had given this tower of strength to the Republic. This victor was his pupil. The light which he saw illuminating this youthful face—reserved perhaps for the Republican Pantheon—was his own thought: his, Cimourdain's. His disciple—the child of his spirit—was from henceforth a hero, and before long would be a glory. It seemed to Cimourdain that he saw the apotheosis of his own soul. He had just seen how Gauvain made war; he was like Chiron, who had watched Achilles fight. There was a mysterious analogy between the priest and the centaur, for the priest is only half-man.

All the chances of this adventure, mingled with the sleeplessness caused by his wound, filled Cimourdain with a sort of mysterious intoxi-

cation. He saw a glorious youthful destiny rising, and what added to his profound joy was the possession of full power over this destiny; another success like that which he had just witnessed, and Cimourdain would only need to speak a single word to induce the Republic to confide an army to Gauvain. Nothing dazzles like the astonishment of complete victory. It was an era when each man had his military dream; each one wanted to make a general: Danton wished to appoint Westermann, Marat wished to appoint Rossignol, Hébert wished to appoint Ronsin, Robespierre wished to put these all aside. Why not Gauvain? asked Cimourdain of himself; and he dreamed. All possibilities were before him: he passed from one hypothesis to another; all obstacles vanished; when a man puts his foot on that ladder, he does not stop; it is an infinite ascent; one starts from earth and one reaches the stars. A great general is only a leader of armies; a great captain is at the same time a leader of ideas; Cimourdain dreamed of Gauvain as a great captain. He seemed to see—for reverie travels swiftly—Gauvain on the ocean, chasing the English; on the Rhine, chastising the Northern kings; on the Pyrenees, repulsing Spain; on the Alps, making a signal to Rome to rouse itself. There were two men in Cimourdain—one tender, the other stern; both were satisfied, for the inexorable was his ideal, and at the same time that he saw Gauvain noble, he saw him terrible. Cimourdain thought of all that it was necessary to destroy before beginning to build up, and said to himself—"Verily, this is no time for tenderesses. Gauvain will be 'up to the mark,'" an expression of the period.

Cimourdain pictured Gauvain spurning the shadows with his foot, with a breastplate of light, a meteor-glare on his brow, rising on the grand ideal wings of Justice, Reason, and Progress, but with a sword in his hand: an angel—a destroyer likewise.

In the height of this reverie, which was almost an ecstasy, he heard through the half-open door a conversation in the great hall of the ambulance which was next his chamber. He recognized Gauvain's voice; through all those years of separation that voice had rung ever in his ear, and the voice of the man had still a tone of the childish voice he had loved. He listened. There was a sound of soldiers' footsteps; one of the men said:

"Commandant, this is the man who fired at you. While nobody was watching, he dragged himself into a cellar. We found him. Here he is."

Then Cimourdain heard this dialogue between Gauvain and the prisoner:

"You are wounded?"

"I am well enough to be shot."

"Lay that man on a bed. Dress his wounds; take care of him; cure him."

"I wish to die."

"You must live. You tried to kill me in the King's name; I show you mercy in the name of the Republic."

A shadow passed across Cimourdain's forehead. He was like a man waking up with a start, and he murmured with a sort of sinister dejection:

"In truth, he is one of the merciful."

CHAPTER VI

A HEALED BREAST; A BLEEDING HEART



CUT heals quickly; but there was in a certain place a person more seriously wounded than Cimourdain. It was the woman who had been shot, whom the beggar Tellmarch had picked up out of the great lake of blood at the farm of Herbe-en-Pail.

Michelle Fléhard was even in a more critical situation than Tellmarch had believed. There was a wound in the shoulder-blade corresponding to the wound above the breast; at the same time that the ball broke her collar-bone, another ball traversed her shoulder, but, as the lungs were not touched, she might recover. Tellmarch was a "philosopher," a peasant phrase which means a little of a doctor, a little of a surgeon, and a little of a sorcerer. He carried the wounded woman to his forest lair, laid her upon his seaweed bed, and treated her by the aid of those mysterious things called "simples," and thanks to him she lived.

The collar-bone knitted together, the wounds in the breast and shoulder closed; after a few weeks she was convalescent. One morning she was able to walk out of the earnichot, leaning on Tellmarch, and seat herself beneath the trees in the sunshine. Tellmarch knew little about her; wounds in the breast demand silence, and during the almost death-like agony which had preceded her recovery she had scarcely spoken a word. When she tried to speak, Tellmarch stopped her, but she kept up an obstinate reverie; he could see in her eyes the sombre going and coming of poignant thoughts. But this morning she was quite strong; she could almost walk alone; a cure is a paternity, and Tellmarch watched her with delight. The good old man began to smile. He said to her:

"We are upon our feet again; we have no more wounds."

"Except in the heart," said she.

She added, presently—"Then you have no idea where they are."

"Who are 'they?'" demanded Tellmarch.

"My children."

This "then" expressed a whole world of thoughts; it signified—"Since you do not talk to me, since you have been so many days beside me without opening your mouth, since you stop me each time I attempt to break the silence, since you seem to fear that I shall speak, it is because you have nothing to tell me."

Often in her fever, in her wanderings, her delirium, she had called her children, and had seen clearly (for delirium makes its observations) that the old man did not reply to her.

The truth was, Tellmarch did not know what to say to her. It is not easy to tell a mother that her children are lost. And then, what did he know? Nothing. He knew that a mother had been shot, that this mother had been found on the ground by himself, that when he had taken her up she was almost a corpse, that this quasi-corpse had three children, and that Lantenac, after having had the mother shot, carried off the little ones. All his information ended there. What had become of the children? Were they even living? He knew, because he had inquired, that there were two boys and a little girl, barely weaned. Nothing more. He asked himself a host of questions concerning this unfortunate group, but could answer none of them. The people of the neighborhood whom he had interrogated contented themselves with shaking their heads. The Marquis de Lantenac was a man of whom they did not willingly talk.

They did not willingly talk *of* De Lantenac, and they did not willingly talk *to* Tellmarch. Peasants have a species of suspicion peculiar to themselves. They did not like Tellmarch. Tellmarch the Caimand was a puzzling man. Why was he always studying the sky? What was he doing and what was he thinking in his long hours of stillness? Yes, indeed, he was odd! In this district in full warfare, in full conflagration, in high tumult; where all men had only one business—devastation—and one work—carnage; where whosoever could burned a house, cut the throats of a family, massacred an outpost, sacked a village; where nobody thought of any thing but laying ambushes for one another, drawing one another into snares, killing one another—this solitary, absorbed in nature, as if submerged in the immense peacefulness of its beauties, gathering herbs and plants, ~~occupied~~ solely with the flowers, the birds, and the stars, was evidently a dangerous man. Plainly he was not in possession of his reason; he did not lie in wait behind



-TELLMARCH AND FLÉCHARD.

thickets; he did not fire a shot at any one. Hence he created a certain dread about him.

"That man is mad," said the passers-by.

Tellmarch was more than an isolated man—he was shunned. People asked him no questions and gave him few answers; so he had not been able to inform himself as he could have wished. The war had drifted elsewhere; the armies had gone to fight farther off; the Marquis de Lantenac had disappeared from the horizon, and in Tellmarch's state of mind for him to be conscious there was a war it was necessary for it to set its foot on him.

After that cry—"My children"—Tellmarch ceased to smile, and the woman went back to her thoughts. What was passing in that soul? It was as if she looked out from the depths of a gulf. Suddenly she turned toward Tellmarch, and cried anew, almost with an accent of rage: "My children!"

Tellmarch drooped his head like one guilty. He was thinking of this Marquis de Lantenac, who certainly was not thinking of him, and who probably no longer remembered that he existed. He accounted for this to himself, saying: "A lord—when he is in danger, he knows you; when he is once out of it, he does not know you any longer."

And he asked himself: "But why, then, did I save this lord?" And he answered his own question: "Because he was a man." Thereupon he remained thoughtful for some time, then began again mentally: "Am I very sure of that?"

He repeated his bitter words: "If I had known!"

This whole adventure overwhelmed him, for in that which he had done he perceived a sort of enigma. He meditated dolorously. A good action might sometimes be evil. He who saves the wolf kills the sheep. He who saves the vulture's wing is responsible for his talons. He felt himself in truth guilty. The unreasoning anger of this mother was just. Still, to have saved her consoled him for having saved the marquis.

But the children?

The mother meditated also. The reflections of these two went on side by side; and, perhaps, though without speech, met one another amid the shadows of reverie.

The woman's eyes, with a night-like gloom in their depths, fixed themselves anew on Tellmarch.

"Nevertheless, that can not be allowed to pass in this way," said she.

"Hush!" returned Tellmarch, laying his finger on his lips.

She continued: "You did wrong to save me, and I am angry with you for it. I would rather be dead, because I am sure I should see

them then. I should know where they are. They would not see me, but I should be near them. The dead—they ought to have power to protect."

He took her arm and felt her pulse.

"Calm yourself; you are bringing back your fever."

She asked him almost harshly, "When can I go away from here?"

"Go away?"

"Yes. Walk."

"Never, if you are not reasonable. To-morrow, if you are wise."

"What do you call being wise?"

"Having confidence in God."

"God! What has He done with my children?"

Her mind seemed wandering. Her voice became very sweet.

"You understand," she said to him, "I can not rest like this. You have never had any children, but I have. That makes a difference. One can not judge of a thing when one does not know what it is. You never had any children, had you?"

"No," replied Tellmarch.

"And I—I had nothing besides them. What am I without my children? I should like to have somebody explain to me *why* I have not my children. I feel that things happen, but I do not understand. They killed my husband; they shot me; all the same, I do not understand it."

"Come," said Tellmarch, "there is the fever taking you again. Do not talk any more."

She looked at him and relapsed into silence.

From this day she spoke no more.

Tellmarch was obeyed more absolutely than he liked. She spent long hours of stupefaction, crouched at the foot of an old tree. She dreamed, and held her peace. Silence makes an impenetrable refuge for simple souls that have been down into the innermost depths of suffering. She seemed to relinquish all effort to understand. To a certain extent despair is unintelligible to the despairing.

Tellmarch studied her with sympathetic interest. In presence of this anguish the old man had thoughts such as might have come to a woman. "Oh, yes," he said to himself, "her lips do not speak, but her eyes talk. I know well what is the matter—what her one idea is. To have been a mother, and to be one no longer! To have been a nurse, and to be so no more! She can not resign herself. She thinks about the tiniest child of all, that she was nursing not long ago. She thinks of it; thinks—thinks. In truth, it must be so sweet to feel a little rosy

mouth that draws your very soul out of your body, and who, with the life that is yours, makes a life for itself."

He kept silence on his side, comprehending the impotency of speech in face of an absorption like this. The persistence of an all-absorbing idea is terrible. And how to make a mother thus beset hear reason? Maternity is inexplicable; you can not argue with it. That it is which renders a mother sublime; she becomes unreasoning; the maternal instinct is divinely animal. The mother is no longer a woman, she is a wild creature. Her children are her cubs. Hence in the mother there is something at once inferior and superior to argument. A mother has an unerring instinct. The immense mysterious Will of creation is within her and guides her. Hers is a blindness superhumanly enlightened.

Now Tellmarch desired to make this unhappy creature speak; he did not succeed. On one occasion he said to her:

"As ill-luck will have it, I am old, and I can not walk any longer. At the end of a quarter of an hour my strength is exhausted, and I am obliged to rest; if it were not for that, I would accompany you. After all, perhaps it is fortunate that I can not. I should be rather a burden than useful to you. I am tolerated here; but the Blues are suspicious of me, as being a peasant; and the peasants suspect me of being a wizard."

He waited for her to reply. She did not even raise her eyes. A fixed idea ends in madness or heroism. But of what heroism is a poor peasant woman capable? None. She can be a mother, and that is all. Each day she buried herself deeper in her reverie. Tellmarch watched her. He tried to give her occupation; he brought her needles and thread and a thimble; and at length, to the satisfaction of the poor Caimand, she began some sewing. She dreamed, but she worked, a sign of health; her energy was returning little by little. She mended her linen, her garments, her shoes; but her eyes looked cold and glassy as ever. As she bent over her needle, she sang unearthly melodies in a low voice. She murmured names—probably the names of children—but not distinctly enough for Tellmarch to catch them. She would break off abruptly and listen to the birds, as if she thought they might have brought her tidings. She watched the weather. Her lips would move—she was speaking low to herself. She made a bag and filled it with chestnuts. One morning Tellmarch saw her preparing to set forth, her eyes gazing away into the depths of the forest.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

She replied, "I am going to look for them."

He did not attempt to detain her.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO POLES OF THE TRUTH



AT the end of a few weeks, which had been filled with the vicissitudes of civil war, the district of Fongères could talk of nothing but the two men who were opposed to each other, and yet were occupied in the same work, that is, fighting side by side the great revolutionary combat.

The savage Vendean duel continued, but the Vendée was losing ground. In Ille-et-Vilaine in particular, thanks to the young commander who had at Dol so opportunely replied to the audacity of six thousand Royalists by the audacity of fifteen hundred patriots, the insurrection, if not quelled, was at least greatly weakened and circumscribed. Several lucky hits had followed that one, and out of these successes had grown a new position of affairs.

Matters had changed their face, but a singular complication had arisen.

In all this portion of the Vendée the Republic had the upper hand—that was beyond a doubt; but which republic? In the triumph which was opening out, two forms of republic made themselves felt—the republic of terror and the republic of clemency—the one desirous to conquer by rigor, and the other by mildness. Which would prevail? These two forms—the conciliating and the implacable—were represented by two men, each of whom possessed his special influence and authority: the one a military commander, the other a civil delegate. Which of them would prevail? One of the two, the delegate, had a formidable basis of support; he had arrived bearing the threatening watchword of the Paris Commune to the battalions of Santerre—“*No mercy; no quarter!*” He had, in order to put every thing under his control, the decree of the Convention, ordaining “death to whomsoever should set at liberty and help a captive rebel chief to escape.” He had full powers, emanating

from the Committee of Public Safety, and an injunction commanding obedience to him as delegate, signed ROBESPIERRE, DANTON, MARAT. The other, the soldier, had on his side only this strength—pity.

He had only his own arm, which chastised the enemy, and his heart, which pardoned them. A conqueror, he believed that he had the right to spare the conquered.

Hence arose a conflict, hidden but deep, between these two men. The two stood in different atmospheres; both combating the rebellion, and each having his own thunderbolt—that of the one, victory; that of the other, terror.

Throughout all the Bocage nothing was talked of but them; and what added to the anxiety of those who watched them from every quarter was the fact that these two men so diametrically opposed were at the same time closely united. These two antagonists were friends. Never sympathy loftier and more profound joined two hearts; the stern had saved the life of the element, and bore on his face the wound received in the effort. These two men were the incarnation—the one of life, the other of death; the one was the principle of destruction, the other of peace, and they loved each other. Strange problem. Imagine Orestes merciful and Pylades pitiless. Picture Arimanes the brother of Ormus!

Let us add that the one of the pair who was called “the ferocious” was, at the same time, the most brotherly of men. He dressed the wounded, cared for the sick, passed his days and nights in the ambulance and hospitals, was touched by the sight of barefooted children, had nothing for himself, gave all to the poor. He was present at all the battles; he marched at the head of the columns, and in the thickest of the fight, armed,—for he had in his belt a sabre and two pistols,—yet disarmed, because no one had ever seen him draw his sabre or touch his pistols. He faced blows, and did not return them. It was said that *he had been a priest*.

One of these men was *Gauvain*; the other was *Cimourdain*.

There was friendship between the two men, but hatred between the two principles; this hidden war could not fail to burst forth. One morning the battle began.

Cimourdain said to Gauvain:

“What have we accomplished?”

Gauvain replied:

“You know as well as I. I have dispersed Lantenac’s bands. He has only a few men left. Then he is driven back to the forest of Fougères. In eight days he will be surrounded.”

“And in fifteen days?”

"He will be taken."

"And then?"

"You have read my notice?"

"Yes. Well?"

"He will be shot."

"More clemency! He must be guillotined."

"As for me," said Gauvain, "I am for a military death."

"And I," replied Cimourdain, "for a revolutionary death."

He looked Gauvain in the face, and added:

"Why did you set at liberty those nuns of the convent of Saint-Marc-le-Blanc?"

"I do not make war on women," answered Gauvain.

"Those women hate the people. And where hate is concerned, one woman outweighs ten men. Why did you refuse to send to the Revolutionary Tribunal all that herd of old fanatical priests who were taken at Louvigné?"

"I do not make war on old men."

"An old priest is worse than a young one. Rebellion is more dangerous preached by white hairs. Men have faith in wrinkles. No false pity, Gauvain. The regicides are liberators. Keep your eye fixed on the tower of the Temple."

"The Temple tower! I would bring the Dauphin out of it. I do not make war on children."

Cimourdain's eyes grew stern.

"Gauvain, learn that it is necessary to make war on a woman when she calls herself Marie Antoinette, on an old man when he is named Pius VI. and Pope, and upon a child when he is named Louis Capet."

"My master, I am not a politician."

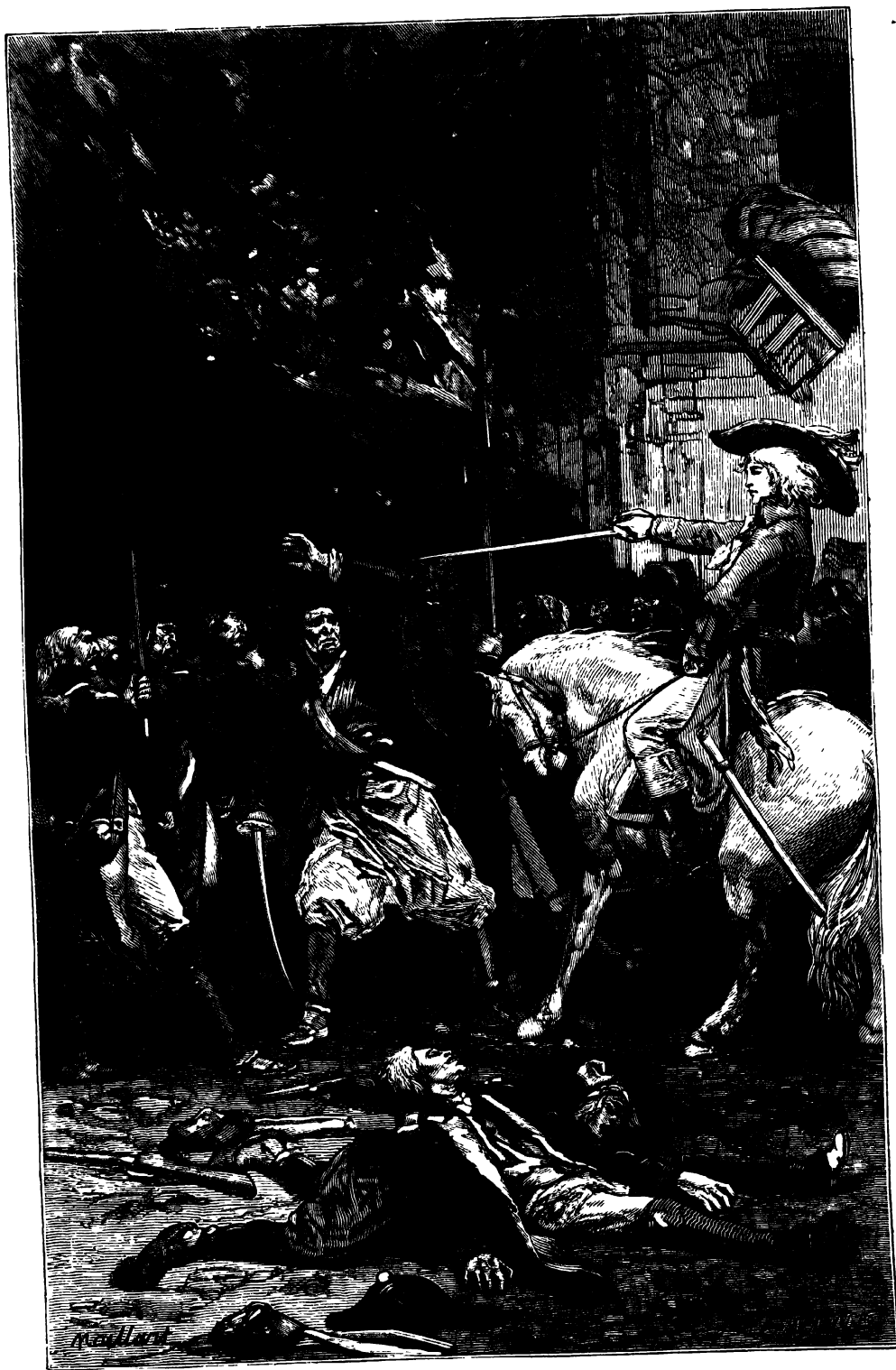
"Try not to be a dangerous man. Why, at the attack on the post of Cossé, when the rebel Jean Treton, driven back and lost, flung himself alone, sabre in hand, against the whole column, didst thou cry, '*Open the ranks! Let him pass!*'?"

✓ "Because one does not set fifteen hundred to kill a single man."

"Why, at the Cailleterie d'Astillé, when you saw your soldiers about to kill the Vendean Joseph Bézier, who was wounded and dragging himself along, did you exclaim, '*Go on before! This is my affair!*' and then fire your pistol in the air?"

"Because one does not kill a man on the ground."

"And you were wrong. Both are to-day chiefs of bands. Joseph Bézier is Mustache, and Jean Treton is Jambe d'Argent. In saving those two men you gave two enemies to the Republic."



‘OPEN THE RANKS!’

"Certainly I could wish to give her friends, and not enemies."

"Why, after the victory of Landéan, did you not shoot your three hundred peasant prisoners?"

"Because Bonchamp had shown mercy to the Republican prisoners, and I wanted it said that the Republic showed mercy to the Royalist prisoners."

"But, then, if you take Lantenac, you will pardon him?"

"No."

"Why? Since you showed mercy to the three hundred peasants?"

"The peasants are ignorant men; Lantenac knows what he does."

"But Lantenac is your kinsman."

"France is the nearest."

"Lantenac is an old man."

"Lantenac is a stranger. Lantenac has no age. Lantenac summons the English. Lantenac is invasion. Lantenac is the enemy of the country. The duel between him and me can only finish by his death or mine."

"Gauvain, remember this vow."

"It is sworn."

There was silence, and the two looked at each other.

Then Gauvain resumed:

"It will be a bloody date, this year '93 in which we live."

"Take care!" cried Cimourdain. "Terrible duties exist. Do not accuse that which is not accusable. Since when is it that the illness is the fault of the physician? Yes, the characteristic of this tremendous year is its pitilessness. Why? Because it is the grand revolutionary year. This year in which we live is the incarnation of the Revolution. The Revolution has an enemy—the old world—and it is without pity for it; just as the surgeon has an enemy—gangrene—and is without pity for it. The Revolution extirpates royalty in the king, aristocracy in the noble, despotism in the soldier, superstition in the priest, barbarism in the judge; in a word, every thing which is tyranny, in all which is the tyrant. The operation is fearful; the Revolution performs it with a sure hand. As to the amount of sound flesh which it sacrifices, demand of Boerhaave what he thinks in regard to that. What tumor does not cause a loss of blood in its cutting away? Does not the extinguishing of a conflagration demand an energy as fierce as that of the fire itself? These formidable necessities are the very condition of success. A surgeon resembles a butcher; a healer may have the appearance of an executioner. The Revolution devotes itself to its fatal work. It mutilates, but it saves. What! You demand pity for the virus! You wish it to be merciful to that which is poisonous! It

will not listen. It holds the post; it will exterminate it. It makes a deep wound in civilization, from whence will spring health to the human race. You suffer? Without doubt. How long will it last? The time necessary for the operation. After that you will live. The Revolution amputates the world. Hence this hemorrhage—93.”

“The surgeon is calm,” said Gauvain, “and the men that I see are violent.”

“The Revolution,” replied Cimourdain, “needs savage workmen to aid it. It pushes aside every hand that trembles. It has only faith in the inexorables. Danton is the terrible; Robespierre is the inflexible; Saint-Just is the immovable; Marat is the implacable. Take care, Gauvain. These names are necessary. They are worth as much as armies to us. They will terrify Europe.”

“And perhaps the future also,” said Gauvain.

He checked himself, and resumed:

“For that matter, my master, you err; I accuse no one. According to me, the true point of view of the Revolution is its irresponsibility. Nobody is innocent, nobody is guilty. Louis XVI. is a sheep thrown among lions. He wishes to escape, he tries to flee, he seeks to defend himself; he would bite if he could. But one is not a lion at will. His craze to be one passes for crime. This enraged sheep shows his teeth. ‘The traitor!’ cry the lions. And they eat him. That done, they fight among themselves.”

“The sheep is a brute.”

“And the lions, what are they?”

This retort set Cimourdain thinking. He raised his head, and answered:

“These lions are consciences. These lions are ideas. These lions are principles.”

“They produce the reign of Terror.”

“One day, the Revolution will be the justification of this Terror.”

“Beware lest the Terror become the calumny of the Revolution.”

Gauvain continued:

“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! these are the dogmas of peace and harmony. Why give them an alarming aspect? What is it we want? To bring the peoples to a universal republic. Well, do not let us make them afraid. What can intimidation serve? The people can no more be attracted by a scarecrow than birds can. One must not do evil to bring about good. One does not overturn the throne in order to leave the gibbet standing. Death to kings, and life to nations! Strike off the crowns; spare the heads. The Revolution is concord, not fright. Clement ideas are ill served by cruel men. Amnesty is to me the most

beautiful word in human language. I will only shed blood in risking my own. Besides, I simply know how to fight; I am nothing but a soldier. But if I may not pardon, victory is not worth the trouble it costs. During battle let us be the enemies of our enemies, and after the victory their brothers."

"Take care!" repeated Cimourdain, for the third time. "Gauvain, you are more to me than a son; take care!"

Then he added, thoughtfully:

"In a period like ours, pity may become one of the forms of treason."

Any one listening to the talk of these two men might have fancied he heard a dialogue between the sword and the axe.



CHAPTER VIII

DOLOROSA

IN the meanwhile the mother was seeking her little ones.

She went straight forward. How did she live? It is impossible to say. She did not know herself. She walked day and night; she begged, she ate herbs, she lay on the ground, she slept in the open air, in the thickets, under the stars, sometimes in the rain and wind.

She wandered from village to village, from farm to farm, seeking a clew. She stopped on the thresholds of the peasants' cots. Her dress was in rags. Sometimes she was welcomed, sometimes she was driven away. When she could not get into the houses, she went into the woods.

She did not know the district; she was ignorant of every thing except Siscoiguard and the parish of Azé; she had no route marked out; she retraced her steps; traveled roads already gone over; made useless journeys. Sometimes she followed the highway, sometimes a cart-track, as often the paths among the copses. In these aimless wanderings she had worn out her miserable garments. She had shoes at first, then she walked barefoot, then with her feet bleeding.

She crossed the track of warfare, among gun-shots, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, avoiding nothing—seeking her children. Revolt was everywhere; there were no more gendarmes, no more mayors, no authorities of any sort. She had only to deal with chance passers.

She spoke to them. She asked:

“Have you seen three little children anywhere?”

Those she addressed would look at her.

“Two boys and a girl,” she would say.

Then she would name them:

“René-Jean, Gros-Alain, Georgette. You have not seen them?”



She would ramble on thus:

"The eldest is four years and a half old; the little girl is twenty months."

Then would come the cry :

"Do you know where they are ? They have been taken from me."

The listeners would stare at her, and that was all.

When she saw that she was not understood, she would say :

"It is because they belong to me—that is why."

The people would pass on their way. Then she would stand still, uttering no further word, but digging at her breast with her nails. However, one day, a peasant listened to her. The good man set himself to thinking.

"Wait, now," said he. "Three children ?"

"Yes."

"Two boys——?"

"And a girl."

"You are hunting for them ?"

"Yes."

"I have heard talk of a lord who had taken three little children and had them with him."

"Where is this man ?" she cried. "Where are they ?"

The peasant replied :

"Go to La Tourgue."

"Shall I find my children there ?"

"It may easily be."

"You say ?"

"La Tourgue."

"What is that—La Tourgue ?"

"It is a place."

"Is it a village—a castle—a farm ?"

"I never was there."

"Is it far ?"

"It is not near."

"In which direction ?"

"Toward Fougères."

"Which way must I go ?"

"You are at Ventortes," said the peasant ; "you must leave Ernée to the left and Coxelles to the right ; you will pass by Lorchamps and cross the Leroux." He pointed his finger to the west.

"Always straight before you and toward the sunset."

Ere the peasant had dropped his arm, she was hurrying on.

He cried after her :

"But take care. They are fighting over there."

She did not answer or turn round ; on she went, straight before her.



LA TOURGUE.

CHAPTER IX

A PROVINCIAL BASTILE

I

LA TOURGUE

FORTY years ago, a traveler who entered the forest of Fougères from the side of Laignelet, and left it toward Parigné, was met on the border of this vast old wood by a sinister spectacle. As he came out of the thickets, La Tourgue rose abruptly before him.

Not La Tourgue living, but La Tourgue dead. La Tourgue cracked, battered, seamed, dismantled. The ruin of an edifice is as much its ghost as a phantom is that of man. No more lugubrious vision could strike the gaze than that of La Tourgue. What the traveler had before his eyes was a lofty round tower, standing alone at the corner of the wood like a malefactor. This tower, rising from a perpendicular rock, was so severe and solid that it looked almost like a bit of Roman architecture, and the frowning mass gave the idea of strength even amid its ruin. It was Roman in a way, since it was Romanic. Begun in the ninth century, it had been finished in the twelfth, after the third Crusade. The peculiar ornaments of the mouldings told its age. On ascending the height, one perceived a breach in the wall; if one ventured to enter, he found himself within the tower—it was empty. It resembled somewhat the inside of a stone trumpet set upright on the ground. From top to bottom no partitions, no ceilings, no floors; there were places where arches and chimneys had been torn away; falconet embrasures were seen; at different heights, rows of granite corbels and a few transverse beams marked where the different stories had been; these beams were covered with the ordure of night birds. The colossal wall was fifteen feet in thickness at the base and twelve at the summit; here

and there were chinks and holes which had been doors, through which one caught glimpses of staircases in the shadowy interior of the wall. The passer-by who penetrated there at evening heard the cry of the wood-owl, the goat-suckers, and the bats, and saw beneath his feet brambles, stones, reptiles; and, above his head, across a black circle which looked like the mouth of an enormous well, he could perceive the stars.



The neighborhood kept a tradition that in the upper stories of this tower there were secret doors formed like those in the tombs of the kings of Judah, of great stones turning on pivots; opening by a spring, and forming part of the wall when closed; an architectural mystery which the Crusaders had brought from the East along with the pointed arch. When these doors were shut, it was impossible to discover them, so accurately were they fitted into the other stones. At this day such doors may still be seen in those mysterious cities of the Anti-Libanus which escaped the burial of the twelve towns in the time of Tiberius.

II

THE BREACH

THE breach by which one entered the ruin had been the opening of a mine. For a connoisseur, familiar with Errard, Sardi, and Pagan, this mine had been skillfully planned. The fire-chamber, shaped like a mitre, was proportioned to the strength of the keep it had been intended to disembowel. It must have held at least two hundredweight of powder. The channel was serpentine, which does better service than a straight one. The crumbling of the mine left naked among the broken stones the saucisse which had the requisite diameter, that of a hen's egg.

The explosion had left a deep rent in the wall by which the besiegers could enter. This tower had evidently sustained at different periods real sieges conducted according to rule. It was scarred with balls, and these balls were not all of the same epoch. Each projectile has its peculiar way of marking a rampart, and those of every sort had left their traces on this keep, from the stone balls of the fourteenth century to the iron ones of the eighteenth.

The breach gave admittance into what must have been the ground-floor. In the wall of the tower opposite the breach there opened the gateway of a crypt cut in the rock and stretching among the foundations of the tower under the whole extent of the ground-floor hall.

This crypt, three fourths filled up, was cleared out in 1855 under the direction of Monsieur Auguste le Prévost, the antiquary of Bernay.

III

THE OUBLIETTE

THIS crypt was the oubliette. Every keep had one. This crypt, like many penal prisons of that era, had two stories. The upper floor, which was entered by the wicket, was a vaulted chamber of considerable size, on a level with the ground-floor hall. On the walls could be seen two parallel and vertical furrows, extending from one side to the other, and passing along the vault of the roof, in which they had left deep ruts like old wheel-tracks. It was what they were in fact. These two furrows had been hollowed by two wheels. Formerly, in feudal days, victims were torn limb from limb in this chamber by a method

less noisy than dragging them at the tails of horses. There had been two wheels so immense that they touched the walls and an arch. To each of these wheels an arm and a leg of the victim were attached, then the wheels were turned in the inverse direction, which crushed the man. It required great force, hence the furrows which the wheels had worn



in the wall as they grazed it. A chamber of this kind may still be seen at Vianden.

Below this room there was another. That was the real dungeon. It was not entered by a door; one penetrated into it by a hole. The victim, stripped naked, was let down by means of a rope placed under his arm-pits into the dungeon, through an opening left in the centre of the flagging of the upper chamber. If he persisted in living, food was flung to him through this aperture. A hole of this sort may yet be seen at Bouillon.

The wind swept up through this opening. The lower room, dug out beneath the ground-floor hall, was a well rather than a chamber. It had water at the bottom, and an icy wind filled it. This wind, which killed the prisoner in the depths, preserved the life of the captive in the room above. It rendered his prison respirable. The captive above, groping about beneath his vault, only got air by this hole. For the rest, whatever entered or fell there could not get out again. It was for the prisoner to be cautious in the darkness. A false step might make the prisoner in the upper room a prisoner in the dungeon below. That was his affair. If he clung to life, this hole was a peril; if he wished to be rid of it, this hole was his resource. The upper floor was the dungeon; the lower, the tomb. A superposition which resembled Society at that period."

It was what our ancestors called a moat-dungeon.

The thing having disappeared, the name has no longer any significance in our ears. Thanks to the Revolution, we hear the words pronounced with indifference.

Outside the tower, above the breach, which forty years since was the only means of ingress, might be seen an opening larger than the other loophole, from which hung an iron grating bent and loosened.

IV

THE BRIDGE-CASTLE

On the opposite side from the breach a stone bridge was connected with the tower, having three arches still in almost perfect preservation. This bridge had supported a building of which some fragments remained. It had evidently been destroyed by fire; there were left only portions of the framework, between whose blackened ribs the daylight peeped, as it rose beside the tower like a skeleton beside a phantom.

This ruin is to-day completely demolished—not a trace of it is left. It only needs one day and a single peasant to destroy that which it took many centuries and many kings to build.

La Tourgue is a rustic abbreviation for La Tour-Gauvain, just as *La Jupelle* stands for La Jupellière, and *Pinson-le-Tort*, the nickname of a hunchbacked leader, is put for Pinson-le-Tortu.

La Tourgue, which forty years since was a ruin, and which is to-day a shadow, was a fortress in 1793. It was the old bastille of the Gauvains; toward the west guarding the entrance to the forest of Fougères, a forest which is itself now hardly a grove.

This citadel had been built on one of the great blocks of slate which abound between Mayenne and Dinan, scattered everywhere among the thickets and heaths like missiles that had been flung in some conflict between Titans.

The tower made up the entire fortress; beneath the tower was the rock; at the foot of the rock one of those water-courses which the month of January turns into a torrent, and which the month of June dries up.

Thus protected, this fortress was in the Middle Ages almost impregnable. The bridge alone weakened it. The Gothic Gauvains had built without bridge. They got into it by one of those swinging foot-bridges which a blow of an axe sufficed to break away. As long as the Gauvains remained viscounts they contented themselves with this, but when they became marquises, and left the cavern for the court, they flung three arches across the torrent, and made themselves accessible on the side of the plain just as they had made themselves accessible to the king. The marquises of the seventeenth century, and the marquises of the eighteenth, no longer wished to be impregnable. An imitation of Versailles replaced the traditions of their ancestors.

Facing the tower, on the western side, there was a high plateau which ended in two plains; this plateau almost touched the tower, only separated from it by a very deep ravine through which ran the water-course, which was a tributary of the Couesnon. The bridge which joined the fortress and the plateau was built up high on piers, and on these piers was constructed, as at Chenonceaux, an edifice in the Mansard style, more habitable than the tower. But customs were still very rude; the lords continued to occupy chambers in the keep which were like dungeons. The building on the bridge, which was a sort of small castle, was made into a long corridor that served as an entrance, and was called the hall of the guards; above this hall of the guards, which was a kind of entresol, a library was built; above the library, a granary. Long windows, with small panes in Bohemian glass; pilasters between the windows; medallions sculptured on the wall; three stories; below, bartizans and muskets; in the middle, books; on high, sacks of oats; the whole at once somewhat savage and very princely.

The tower rose gloomy and stern at the side.

It overlooked this coquettish building with all its lugubrious height. From its platform one could destroy the bridge.

The two edifices, the one rude, the other elegant, clashed rather than contrasted. The two styles had nothing in keeping with one another. Although it should seem that two semicircles ought to be identical, nothing can be less alike than a Romanic arch and the classic archivault.

That tower, in keeping with the forests, made a strange neighbor for that bridge, worthy of Versailles. Imagine Alain Barbe-Torte giving his arm to Louis XIV. The juxtaposition was sinister. These two majesties thus mingled made up a whole which had something inexpressibly menacing in it.

From a military point of view, the bridge—we must insist upon this—was a traitor to the tower. It embellished, but disarmed; in gaining ornament the fortress lost strength. The bridge put it on a level with the plateau. Still impregnable on the side toward the forest, it became vulnerable toward the plain. Formerly it commanded the plateau; now it was commanded thereby. An enemy installed there would speedily become master of the bridge. The library and the granary would be for the assailant and against the citadel. A library and a granary resemble each other in the fact that both books and straw are combustible. For an assailant who serves himself by fire, to burn Homer or to burn a bundle of straw, provided it make a flame, is all the same. The French proved this to the Germans by burning the library at Heidelberg, and the Germans proved it to the French by burning the library of Strasburg. This bridge, added to the Tourgue, was, therefore, strategically, an error; but in the seventeenth century, under Colbert and Louvois, the Gauvain princes no more considered themselves besiegable than did the princes of Rohan or the princes of La Trémoille. Still the builders of the bridge had used certain precautions. In the first place they had foreseen the possibility of conflagration: below the three casements that looked down the stream they had fastened transversely to cramp-irons, which could still be seen half a century back, a strong ladder, whose length equaled the height of the two first stories of the bridge, a height which surpassed that of three ordinary stories. Secondly, they had guarded against assault. They had cut off the bridge by means of a low, heavy iron door; this door was arched; it was locked by a great key, which was hidden in a place known to the master alone, and, once closed, this door could defy a battering-ram and almost brave a cannon-ball.

It was necessary to cross the bridge in order to reach this door, and to pass through the door in order to enter the tower. There was no other entrance.

V

THE IRON DOOR

THE second story of the castle on the bridge was raised by the arches, so that it corresponded with the second story of the tower. It was at this height, for greater security, that the iron door had been placed.

The iron door opened toward the library on the bridge side, and toward a grand vaulted hall, with a pillar in the centre, on the side to the tower. This hall, as has already been said, was the second story of the keep. It was circular, like the tower; long loopholes, looking out on the fields, lighted it. The rude wall was naked, and nothing hid the stones, which were, however, symmetrically laid. This hall was reached by a winding staircase built in the wall, a very simple thing when walls are fifteen feet in thickness. In the Middle Ages a town had to be taken street by street, a street house by house, a house room by room. A fortress was besieged story by story. In this respect La Tourgue was very skillfully disposed, and was intractable and difficult. A spiral staircase, at first very steep, led from one floor to the other. The doors were askew, and were not of the height of a man. To pass through it was necessary to bow the head; now a head bowed was a head cut off, and at each door the besieged awaited the besiegers.

Below the circular hall with the pillar were two similar chambers, which made the first and the ground floor, and above were three. Upon these six chambers, placed one upon another, the tower was closed by a lid of stone, which was the platform, and which could only be reached by a narrow watch-tower. The fifteen feet thickness of wall which it had been necessary to pierce in order to place the iron door, and in the middle of which it was set, imbedded it in a long arch, so that the door when closed was, both on the side toward the bridge and the side toward the tower, under a porch six or seven feet deep; when it was open, these two porches joined and made the entrance-arch.

In the thickness of the wall of the porch toward the bridge opened the low gate of a Saint Gilles's screw-stairway, which led into the corridor of the first story beneath the library. This offered another difficulty to besiegers. The small castle of the bridge showed, on the side toward the plateau, only a perpendicular wall; and the bridge was cut there. A draw-bridge put it in communication with the plateau; and this draw-bridge (on account of the height of the plateau, never

lowered except at an inclined plane) allowed access to the long corridor, called the guard-room. Once masters of this corridor, besiegers, in order to reach the iron door, would have been obliged to carry by main force the winding staircase which led to the second story.

VI

THE LIBRARY

As for the library, it was an oblong room, the width and length of the bridge, with a single door—the iron one. A false leaf-door, hung with green cloth, which it was only necessary to push, masked in the interior the entrance-arch of the tower. The library wall from floor to ceiling was filled with glazed book-cases, in the beautiful style of the seventeenth-century cabinet-work. Six great windows, three on either side, one above each arch, lighted this library. Through these windows the interior could be seen from the height of the plateau. In the spaces between these windows stood six marble busts on pedestals of sculptured oak: Hermolaüs, of Byzantium; Athenæus, the grammarian of Naucratis; Suidas; Casaubon; Clovis, King of France; and his chancellor, Anachalus, who, for that matter, was no more chancellor than Clovis was king.

There were books of various sorts in this library. One has remained famous. It was an old quarto with prints, having for title, "SAINT BARTHOLOMEW," in great letters; and for second title, "*Gospel according to Saint Bartholomew, preceded by a dissertation by Pantanus, Christian philosopher, as to whether this gospel ought to be considered apocryphal, and whether Saint Bartholomew was the same as Nathaniel.*" This book, considered an unique copy, was placed on a reading-desk in the middle of the library. In the last century, people came to see it as a curiosity.

VII

THE GRANARY

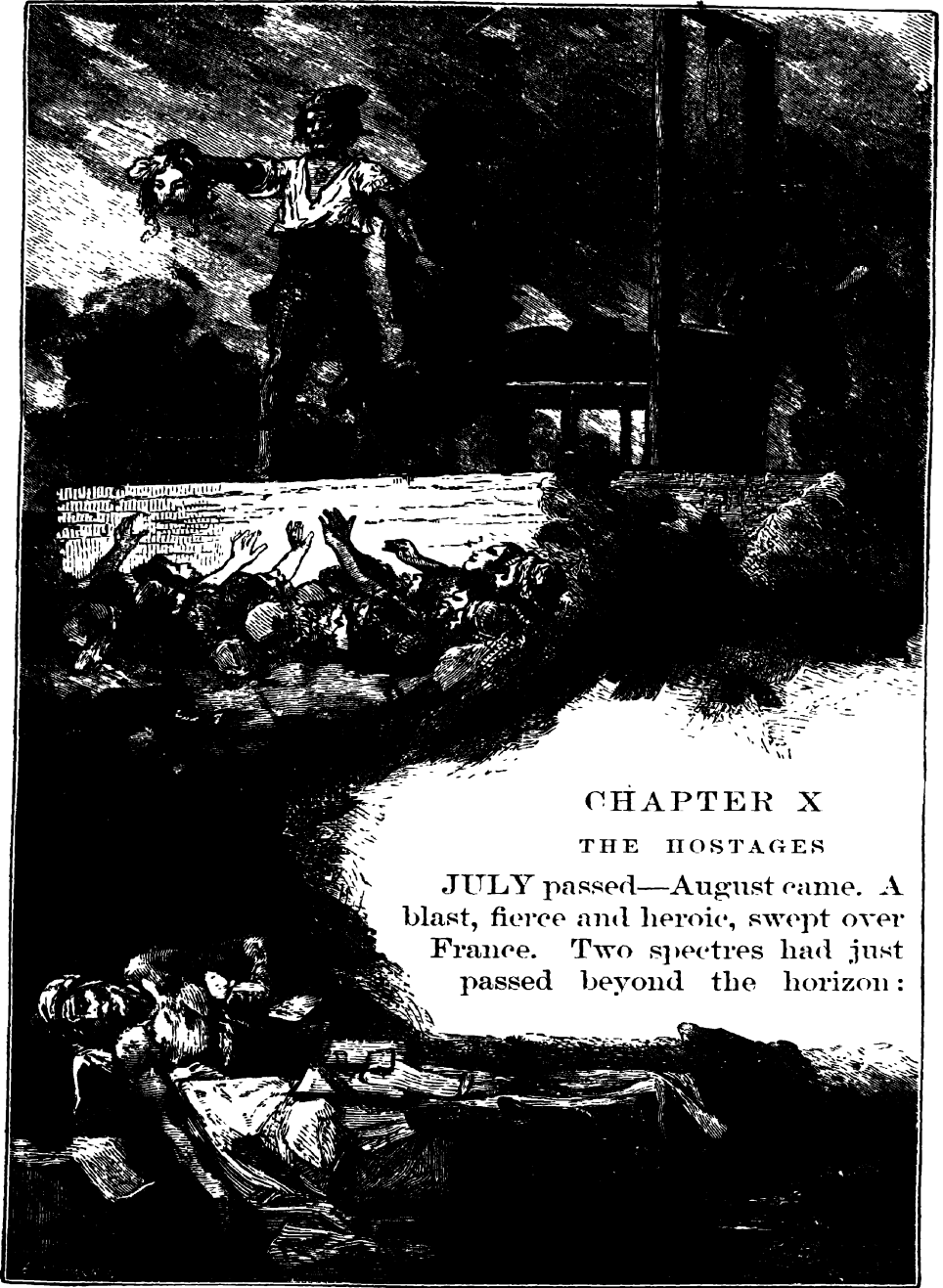
As for the granary, which took, like the library, the oblong form of the bridge, it was simply the space beneath the woodwork of the roof. It was a great room filled with straw and hay, and lighted by six

Mansard windows. There was no ornament, except a figure of Saint Bartholomew carved on the door, with this line beneath:

"Barnabus sanctus falcem jubet ire per herbam."

Thus it was a lofty, wide tower, of six stories, pierced here and there with loopholes, having for entrance and egress a single door of iron, leading to a bridge-castle, closed by a draw-bridge; behind the tower a forest; in front a plateau of heath, higher than the bridge, lower than the tower; beneath the bridge, a deep, narrow ravine full of brushwood; a torrent in winter, a brook in spring-time, a stony moat in summer. This was the Tower Gauvain, called La Tourgue.





CHAPTER X

THE HOSTAGES

JULY passed—August came. A blast, fierce and heroic, swept over France. Two spectres had just passed beyond the horizon:

Marat with a dagger in his heart, Charlotte Corday headless. Affairs everywhere were waxing formidable. As to the Vendée, beaten in grand strategic schemes, she took refuge in little ones—more redoubtable, we have already said. This war was now an immense fight, scattered about among the woods. The disasters of the large army, called the Catholic and Royal, had commenced. The army from Mayence had been ordered into the Vendée. Eight thousand Vendéans had fallen at Ancenis; they had been repulsed from Nantes, dislodged from Montaigu, expelled from Thouars, chased from Noirmoutier, flung headlong out of Cholet, Mortagne, and Saumur; they had evacuated Parthenay; they had abandoned Clisson; fallen back from Châtillon; lost a flag at Saint-Hilaire; had been beaten at Pornic, at the Sables, at Fontenay, Doné, at the Château d'Eau, at the Ponts-de-Cé; they were kept in check at Luçon, were retreating from the Chataigneraye, and routed at the Roche-sur-Yon. But on the one hand they were menacing Rochelle, and on the other an English fleet in the Guernsey waters, commanded by General Craig, and bearing several English regiments and some of the best officers of the French navy, only waited a signal from the Marquis de Lantenac to land. This landing might make the Royalist revolt again victorious. Pitt was in truth a State malefactor. Policy has treasons sure as an assassin's dagger. Pitt stabbed our country and betrayed his own. To dishonor his country was to betray it; under him and through him England waged a Punic war. She spied, she cheated, she hid. Poacher and forger, she stopped at nothing; she descended to the very minutiae of hatred. She monopolized tallow, which cost five francs a pound. An Englishman was taken at Lille on whom was found a letter from Prigent, Pitt's agent in Vendée, which contained these lines: "I beg you to spare no money. We hope that the assassinations will be committed with prudence; disguised priests and women are the persons most fit for this duty. Send sixty thousand francs to Rouen and fifty thousand to Caen." This letter was read in the Convention on the first of August by Barère. The cruelties of Parrein, and, later, the atrocities of Carrier, replied to these perfidies. The Republicans of Metz and the Republicans of the South were eager to march against the rebels. A decree ordered the formation of eighty companies of pioneers for burning the copses and thickets of the Bocage. It was an unheard-of crisis. The war only ceased on one footing to begin on another. "No mercy! No prisoners!" was the cry of both parties. The history of that time is black with awful shadows.

During this month of August, La Tourgue was besieged.

One evening, just as the stars were rising amid the calm twilight of the dog-days, when not a leaf stirred in the forest, not a blade of grass

trembled on the plain, across the stillness of the night swept the sound of a horn. This horn was blown from the top of the tower.

The peal was answered by the voice of a clarion from below.

On the summit of the tower stood an armed man; at the foot, a camp spread out in the shadow.

In the obscurity about the Tower Gauvain could be distinguished a moving mass of black shapes. It was a bivouac. A few fires began to blaze beneath the trees of the forest and among the heaths of the plateau, pricking the darkness here and there with luminous points, as if the earth were studding itself with stars at the same instant as the sky; but they were the sinister stars of war. On the side toward the plateau, the bivouac stretched out to the plains; and on the forest side extended into the thicket. La Tourgue was invested.

The outstretch of the besiegers' bivouac indicated a numerous force.

The camp tightly clasped the fortress, coming close up to the rock on the side toward the tower, and close to the ravine on the bridge side.

There was a second sound of the horn, followed by another peal from the clarion.

This time the horn questioned and the trumpet replied.

It was the demand of the tower to the camp: "Can we speak to you?" The clarion was the answer for the camp: "Yes."

At this period, the Vendéans, not being considered belligerents by the Convention, and a decree having forbidden the exchange of flags of truce with "the brigands," the armies supplemented as they could the means of communication which the law of nations authorizes in ordinary war and interdicts in civil strife. Hence on occasion a certain understanding between the peasant's horn and the military trumpet.

The first call was only to attract attention; the second put the question, "Will you listen?" If on this second summons the clarion kept silent, it was a refusal; if the clarion replied, it was a consent. It signified, "Truce for a few moments."

The clarion having answered the second appeal, the man on the top of the tower spoke, and these words could be heard:

"Men, who listen to me, I am Gouge-le-Bruant, surnamed Brise-Bleu, because I have exterminated many of yours; surnamed also Imâ-nus, because I mean to kill still more than I have already done. My finger was cut off by a blow from a sabre on the barrel of my gun in the attack at Granville; at Laval you guillotined my father, my mother, and my sister Jacqueline, aged eighteen. This is who I am.

"I speak to you in the name of my lord Marquis Gauvain de Lan-

tenac, Viscount de Fontenay, Breton prince, lord of the Seven Forests—my master.

“Learn first that Monseigneur the Marquis, before shutting himself in this tower where you hold him blockaded, distributed the command among six chiefs, his lieutenants. He gave to Delière the district between the road to Brest and the road to Ernée; to Tréton, the district between Roë and Laval; to Jacquet, called Taillefer, the border of the Haut-Maine; to Gaulier, named Grand Pierre, Château Gontier; to Lecomte, Craon; Fougères to Dubois Guy, and all Mayenne to De Rochambeau. So the taking of this fortress will not end matters for you; and even if Monseigneur the Marquis should die, the Vendée of God and the King will still live.

“That which I say—know this—is to warn you. Monseigneur is here by my side. I am the mouth through which his words pass. You who are besieging us, keep silence.

“This is what it is important for you to hear:

“Do not forget that the war you are making against us is without justice. We are men inhabiting our own country, and we fight honestly; we are simple and pure, beneath the will of God, as the grass is beneath the dew. It is the Republic which has attacked us; she comes to trouble us in our fields; she has burned our houses, our harvests, and ruined our farms, while our women and children were forced to wander with naked feet among the woods while the winter robin was still singing.

“You who are down there and who hear me, you have inclosed us in the forest and surrounded us in this tower; you have killed or dispersed those who joined us; you have cannon; you have added to your troop the garrisons and posts of Mortain, of Barenton, of Teillenl, of Landivy, of Evran, of Tinteniach, and of Vitré, by which means you are four thousand five hundred soldiers who attack us, and we—we are nineteen men who defend ourselves.

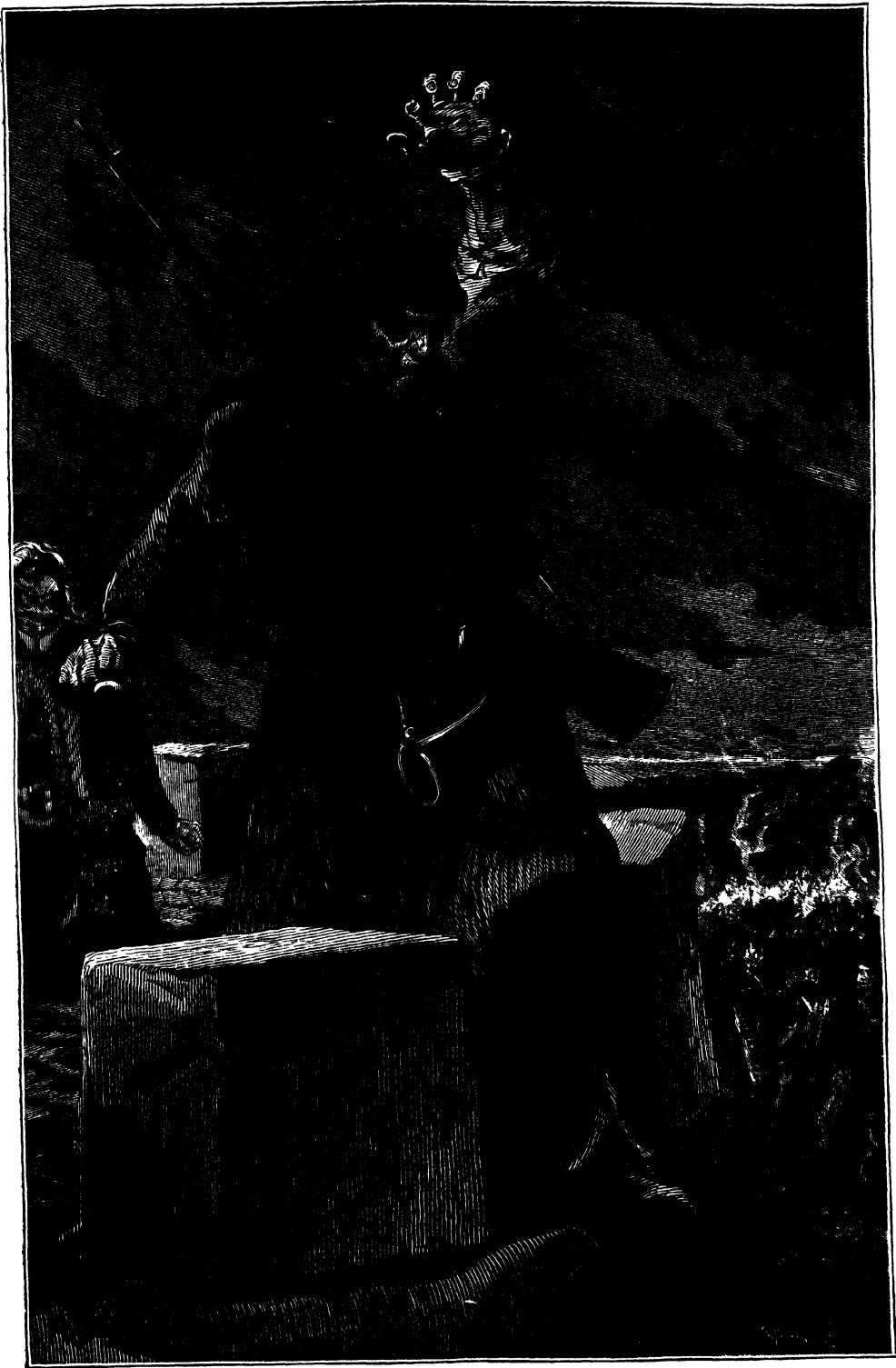
“You have provisions and munitions.

“You have succeeded in mining and blowing up a corner of our rock and a bit of our wall.

“That has made a gap at the foot of the tower, and this gap is a breach by which you can enter, although it is not open to the sky; and the tower, still upright and strong, makes an arch above it.

“Now, you are preparing the assault.

“And we—first, Monseigneur the Marquis, who is Prince of Brittany, and secular Prior of the Abbey of Saint Marie de Lantenac, where a daily mass was established by Queen Jeanne; and, next to him, the other defenders of the tower, who are: the Abbé Turmeau, whose mil-



IMÂNUS.

itary name is Grand Francœur; my comrade, Guinoiseau, who is captain of Camp Vert; my comrade, Chante-en-Hiver, who is captain of Camp Avoine; my comrade, Musette, who is captain of Camp Fourmis; and I, peasant, born in the town of Daon, through which runs the brook Moriandre: we all—all have one thing to say to you.

"Men who are at the bottom of this tower, listen:

"We have in our hands three prisoners, who are three children. These children were adopted by one of your regiments, and they belong to you. We offer to surrender these three children to you.

"On one condition.

"It is, that we shall depart freely.

"If you refuse—listen well—you can only attack us in one of two ways: by the breach, on the side of the forest, or by the bridge, on the side of the plateau. The building on the bridge has three stories; in the lower story I, Imânus—I, who speak to you—have put six hogsheads of tar and a hundred fascines of dried heath; in the top story there is straw; in the middle story there are books and papers; the iron door which communicates between the bridge and the tower is closed, and Monseigneur carries the key; I have myself made a hole under the door, and through this hole passes a sulphur slow-match, one end of which is in the tar and the other within reach of my hand, inside the tower. I can fire it when I choose. If you refuse to let us go out, the three children will be placed in the second floor of the bridge, between the story where the sulphur-match touches the tar and the floor where the straw is, and the iron door will be shut on them. If you attack by the bridge, it will be you who set the building on fire; if you attack by the breach, it will be we; if you attack by the breach and the bridge at the same time, the fire will be kindled at the same instant by us both, and, in any case, the three children will perish.

"Now, accept or refuse.

"If you accept, we come out.

"If you refuse, the children die.

"I have spoken."

The man speaking from the top of the tower became silent.

A voice from below cried:

"We refuse."

This voice was abrupt and severe. Another voice, less harsh, though firm, added:

"We give you four-and-twenty hours to surrender at discretion."

There was a silence, then the same voice continued—"To-morrow, at this hour, if you have not surrendered, we commence the assault."

And the first voice resumed:

"And then no quarter!"

To this savage voice another replied from the top of the tower. Between the two battlements a lofty figure bent forward, and in the starlight the stern face of the Marquis de Lantenac could be distinguished; his sombre glance shot down into the obscurity and seemed to look for some one; and he cried:

"Hold, it is thou, priest!"

"Yes, traitor; it is I," replied the stern voice from below.



CHAPTER XI

TERRIBLE AS THE ANTIQUE

THE implacable voice was, in truth, that of Cimourdain; the younger and less imperative that of Gauvain.

The Marquis de Lantenac did not deceive himself in fancying that he recognized Cimourdain.

As we know, a few weeks in this district, made bloody by civil war, had rendered Cimourdain famous; there was no notoriety more darkly sinister than his; people said: Marat at Paris, Châlier at Lyons, Cimourdain in Vendée. They stripped the Abbé Cimourdain of all the respect which he had formerly commanded; that is the consequence of a priest's unfrocking himself. Cimourdain inspired horror. The severe are unfortunate; those who note their acts condemn them, though, perhaps, if their consciences could be seen, they would stand absolved. A Lysurgus misunderstood appears a Tiberius. Those two men, the Marquis de Lantenac and the Abbé Cimourdain, were equally poised in the balance of hatred. The maledictions of the Royalists against Cimourdain made a counterpoise to the execrations of the Republicans against Lantenac. Each of these men was a monster to the opposing camp; so far did this equality go, that while Prieur of the Marne was setting a price on the head of Lantenac, Charette at Noirmoutiers set a price on the head of Cimourdain.

Let us add, these two men, the marquis and the priest, were up to a certain point the same man. The bronze mask of civil war has two profiles, the one turned toward the past, the other set toward the future, but both equally tragic. Lantenac was the first of these profiles, Cimourdain the second; only the bitter sneer of Lantenac was full of shadow and night, and on the fatal brow of Cimourdain shone a gleam from the morning.

And now the besieged of La Tourgue had a respite.

Thanks to the intervention of Gauvain, a sort of truce for twenty-four hours had been agreed upon.

Imânus had, indeed, been well informed; through the requisitions of Cimourdain, Gauvain had now four thousand five hundred men under his command, part national guards, part troops of the line; with these he had surrounded Lantenac in La Tourgue, and was able to level twelve cannon at the fortress: a masked battery of six pieces on the edge of the forest toward the tower, and an open battery of six on the plateau, toward the bridge.

He had succeeded in springing the mine and making a breach at the foot of the tower.

Thus, when the twenty-four hours' truce was ended, the attack would begin under these conditions:

On the plateau and in the forest were four thousand five hundred men.

In the tower, nineteen!

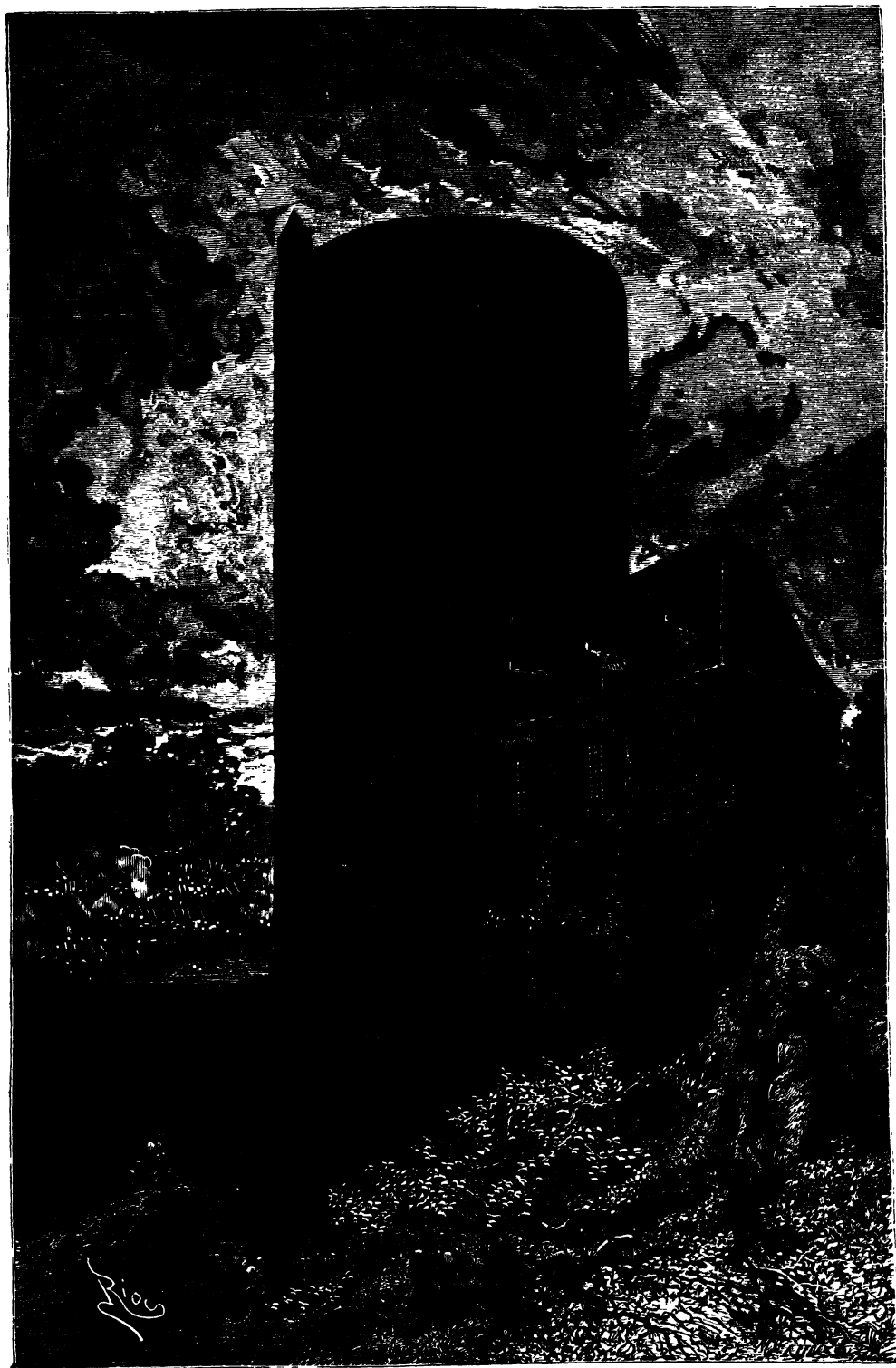
History might find the names of those besieged nineteen in the list of outlaws. We shall perhaps encounter them.

As commander of these four thousand five hundred men, which almost made an army, Cimourdain had wished Gauvain to allow himself to be made Adjutant-General. Gauvain refused, saying, "When Lantenac is taken, we will see. As yet, I have merited nothing."

Those great commands, with low regimental rank, were, for that matter, a custom among the Republicans. Bonaparte was, after this, at the same time colonel of artillery and general-in-chief of the army of Italy.

The Tower Gauvain had a strange destiny: a Gauvain attacked, a Gauvain defended it. From that fact rose a certain reserve in the attack, but not in the defense, for Lantenac was a man who spared nothing; moreover, he had always lived at Versailles, and had no personal associations with La Tourgue, which he scarcely knew indeed. He had sought refuge there because he had no other asylum—that was all. He would have demolished it without scruple. Gauvain had more respect for the place.

The weak point of the fortress was the bridge, but in the library, which was on the bridge, were the family archives; if the assault took place on that side, the burning of the bridge would be inevitable; to burn the archives seemed to Gauvain like attacking his forefathers. La Tourgue was the ancestral dwelling of the Gauvains; in this tower centred all their fiefs of Brittany, just as all the fiefs of France centred in the tower of the Louvre; the home associations of Gauvain were there; he had been born within those walls; the tortuous fatalities of



THE GAUVAIN TOWER.



life forced him, a man, to attack this venerable pile which had sheltered him when a child. Could he be guilty of the impiety of reducing this dwelling to ashes? Perhaps his very cradle was stored in some corner of the granary above the library. Certain reflections are emotions. Gauvain felt himself moved in the presence of this ancient house of his family. That was why he had spared the bridge. He had confined himself to making any sally or escape impossible by this outlet, and had guarded the bridge by a battery, and chosen the opposite side for the attack. Hence the mining and sapping at the foot of the tower.

Cimourdain had allowed him to take his own way; he reproached himself for it; his stern spirit revolted against all these Gothic relics, and he no more believed in pity for buildings than for men. Sparing a castle was a beginning of clemency. Now clemency was Gauvain's weak point. Cimourdain, as we have seen, watched him, drew him back from this, in his eyes, fatal weakness. Still he himself, though he felt a sort of rage in being forced to admit it to his soul, had not reseen La Tourgue without a secret shock; he felt himself softened at the sight of that study where were still the first books he had made Gauvain read. He had been the priest of the neighboring village, Parigné; he, Cimourdain, had dwelt in the attic of the bridge-castle; it was in the library that he had held Gauvain between his knees as a child and taught him to lisp out the alphabet; it was within those four old walls that he had seen grow this well-beloved pupil, the son of his soul, increase physically and strengthen in mind. This library, this small castle, these walls full of his blessings upon the child, was he about to overturn and burn them? He had shown them mercy. Not without remorse.

He had allowed Gauvain to open the siege from the opposite point. La Tourgue had its savage side, the tower, and its civilized side, the library. Cimourdain had allowed Gauvain to batter a breach in the savage side alone.

In truth, attacked by a Gauvain, defended by a Gauvain, this old dwelling returned in the height of the French Revolution to feudal customs. Wars between kinsmen make up the history of the Middle Ages: the Eteocles and Polynices are Gothic as well as Grecian, and Hamlet does at Elsinore what Orestes did in Argos.

CHAPTER XII

POSSIBLE ESCAPE

THE whole night was consumed in preparations on the one side and the other.

As soon as the sombre parley which we have just heard had ended, Gauvain's first act was to call his lieutenant.

Guéchamp, of whom it will be necessary to know somewhat, was a man of second-rate, honest, intrepid, mediocre, a better soldier than leader, rigorously intelligent up to the point where it ceases to be a duty to understand; never softened; inaccessible to corruption of *any* sort, whether of venality, which corrupts the conscience, or of pity, which corrupts justice. He had on soul and heart those two shades—discipline and the countersign, as a horse has his blinkers on both eyes, and he walked unflinchingly in the space thus left visible to him. His way was straight, but narrow.

A man to be depended on; rigid in command, exact in obedience. Gauvain spoke rapidly to him.

"Guéchamp, a ladder."

"Commandant, we have none."

"One must be had."

"For scaling?"

"No; for escape."

Guéchamp reflected an instant, then answered:

"I understand. But for what you want it must be very high."

"At least three stories."

"Yes, commandant, that is pretty nearly the height."

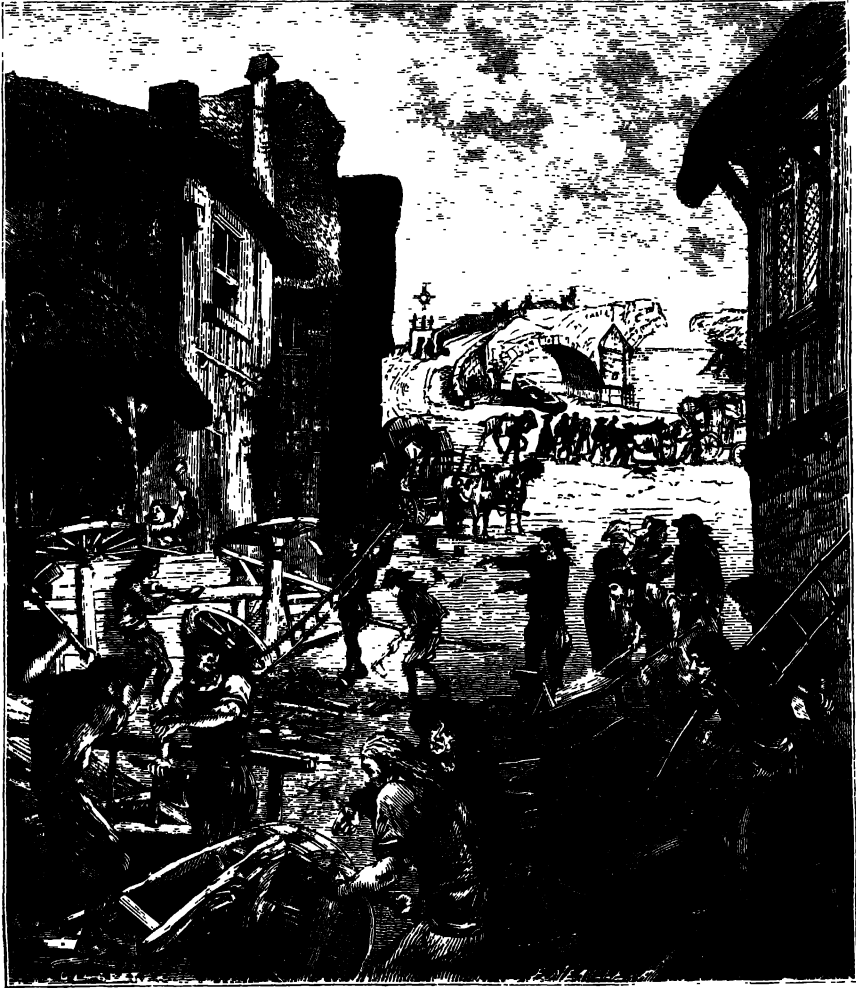
"It must even go beyond that, for we must be certain of success."

"Without doubt."

"How does it happen that you have no ladder?"

"Commandant, you did not think best to besiege La Tourgue by

the plateau; you contented yourself with blockading it on this side; you wished to attack, not by the bridge, but the tower. So we only busied ourselves with the mine, and the escalade was given up. That is why we have no ladders."



"Have one made immediately."

"A ladder three stories high can not be improvised."

"Have several short ladders joined together."

"One must have them in order to do that."

"Find them."

"There are none to be found. All through the country the peas-

ants destroy the ladders, just as they break up the carts and cut the bridges."

"It is true; they try to paralyze the Republic."

"They want to manage so that we can neither transport baggage, cross a river, nor escalade a wall."

"Still, I must have a ladder."

"I just remember, commandant, at Javené, near Fougères, there is a large carpenter's shop. They might have one there."

"There is not a minute to lose."

"When do you want the ladder?"

"To-morrow at this hour, at the latest."

"I will send an express full speed to Javené. He can take a requisition. There is a post of cavalry at Javené which will furnish an escort. The ladder can be here to-morrow before sunset."

"It is well; that will answer," said Gauvain; "act quickly—go."

Ten minutes after Guéchamp came back and said to Gauvain:

"Commandant, the express has started for Javené."

Gauvain ascended the plateau and remained for a long time with his eyes fixed on the bridge-castle across the ravine. The gable of the building, without other means of access than the low entrance closed by the raising of the draw-bridge, faced the escarpment of the ravine. In order to reach the arches of the bridge from the plateau, it was necessary to descend this escarpment, a feat possible to accomplish by clinging to the brushwood. But once in the moat, the assailants would be exposed to all the projectiles that might rain from the three stories. Gauvain finished by convincing himself that, at the point which the siege had reached, the veritable attack ought to be by the breach of the tower.

He took every measure to render any escape out of the question; he increased the strictness of the investment; drew closer the ranks of his battalions, so that nothing could pass between. Gauvain and Cîmourdain divided the investment of the fortress between them. Gauvain reserved the forest side for himself, and gave Cîmourdain the side of the plateau. It was agreed that while Gauvain, seconded by Guéchamp, conducted the assault through the mine, Cîmourdain should guard the bridge and ravine with every match of the open battery lighted.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT THE MARQUIS WAS DOING

WHILE without every preparation for the attack was going on, within every thing was preparing for resistance. It is not without a real analogy that a tower is called a "douve," and sometimes a tower is breached by a mine as a cask is bored by an auger. The wall opens like a bung-hole. This was what had happened at La Tourgue.

The great blast of two or three hundredweight of powder had burst the mighty wall through and through. This breach started from the foot of the tower, traversed the wall in its thickest part, and made a sort of shapeless arch in the ground-floor of the fortress. On the outside the besiegers, in order to render this gap practicable for assault, had enlarged and finished it off by cannon-shots.

The ground-floor which this breach penetrated was a great round hall, entirely empty, with a central pillar which supported the keystone of the vaulted roof. This chamber, the largest in the whole keep, was not less than forty feet in diameter. Each story of the tower was composed of a similar room, but smaller, with guards to the embrasures of the loopholes. The ground-floor chamber had neither loopholes nor air-holes; there was about as much air and light as in a tomb.

The door of the dungeon, made more of iron than wood, was in this ground-floor room. Another door opened upon a staircase which led to the upper chambers. All the staircases were contrived in the interior of the wall.

It was into this lower room that the besiegers could arrive by the breach they had made. This hall taken, there would still be the tower to take.

It had always been impossible to breathe in that hall for any

length of time. Nobody ever passed twenty-four hours there without suffocating. Now, thanks to the breach, one could exist there.

That was why the besieged had not closed the breach. Besides, of what service would it have been? The cannon would have reopened it.

They stuck an iron torch-holder into the wall, and put a torch in it, which lighted the ground-floor.

Now how to defend themselves?

To wall up the hole would be easy, but useless. A *retirade* would be of more service. A *retirade* is an intrenchment with a re-entering angle; a sort of raffed barricade, which admits of converging the fire upon the assailants, and while leaving the breach open exteriorly, blocks it on the inside. Materials were not lacking. They constructed a *retirade* with fissures for the passage of the gun-barrels. The angle was supported by the central pillar, the wings touched the wall on either side. The marquis directed every thing. Inspirer, commander, guide, and master—a terrible spirit.

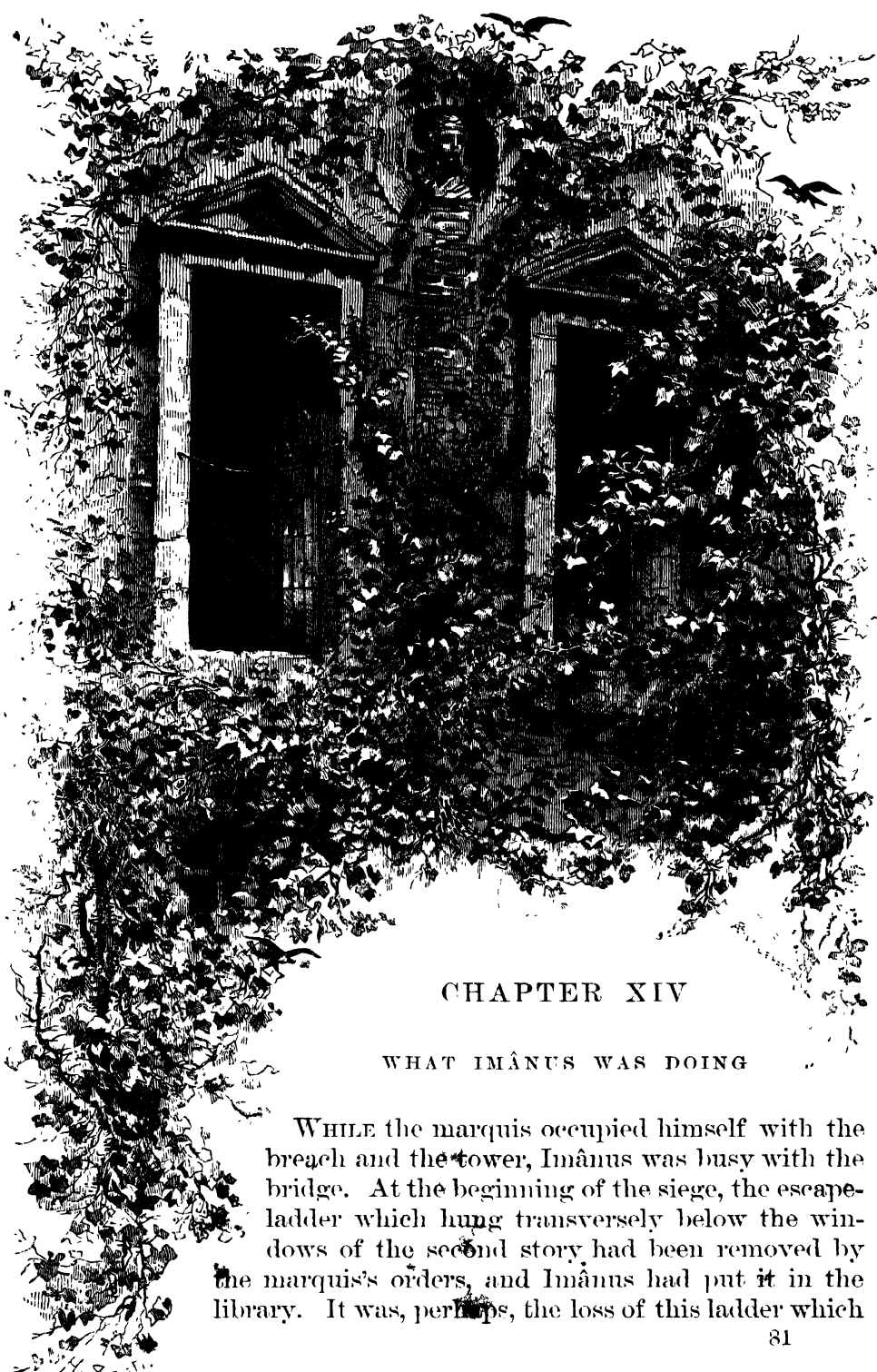
Lautenac belonged to that race of warriors of the eighteenth century who, at eighty years, saved cities. He resembled that Count d'Alberg, who, almost a centenarian, drove the King of Poland from Riga.

"Courage, friends," said the marquis; "at the commencement of this century, in 1713, at Bender, Charles XII., shut up in a house with three hundred Swedes, held his own against twenty thousand Turks."

They barricaded the two lower floors, fortified the chambers, battlemented the alcoves, supported the doors with joists driven in by blows from a mallet; and thus formed a sort of buttress. It was necessary to leave free the spiral staircase which joined the different floors, for they must be able to get up and down, and to stop it against the besiegers would have been to close it against themselves. The defense of any place has thus always some weak side.

The marquis, indefatigable, robust as a young man, lifted beams, carried stones—set an example—put his hand to the work, commanded, aided, fraternized, laughed with this ferocious clan, but remained always the noble still—haughty, familiar, elegant, savage.

He permitted no reply to his orders. He had said: "*If the half of you should revolt, I would have them shot by the other half, and defend the place with those that were left.*" Such things make a leader adored.



CHAPTER XIV

WHAT IMÂNUS WAS DOING

WHILE the marquis occupied himself with the breach and the tower, Imânus was busy with the bridge. At the beginning of the siege, the escape-ladder which hung transversely below the windows of the second story had been removed by the marquis's orders, and Imânus had put it in the library. It was, perhaps, the loss of this ladder which

Gauvain wished to supply. The windows of the lower floor, called the guard-room, were defended by a triple bracing of iron bars, set in the stone, so that neither ingress nor egress was possible by them. The library windows had no bars, but they were very high. Imânus took three men with him, who, like himself, possessed capabilities and resolution that would carry them through any thing. These men were Hoisnard, called Branche d'Or, and the two brothers Pique-en-Bois. Imânus, carrying a dark lantern, opened the iron door and carefully visited the three stories of the bridge-castle. Hoisnard, Branche d'Or, was implacable as Imânus, having had a brother killed by the Republicans.

Imânus examined the upper room, filled with hay and straw, and the ground-floor, where he had several fire-pots added to the tuns of tar; he placed the heap of fascines so that they touched the casks, and assured himself of the good condition of the sulphur-match, of which one end was in the bridge and the other in the tower. He spread over the floor, under the tuns and fascines, a pool of tar, in which he dipped the end of the sulphur-match. Then he brought into the library, between the ground-floor where the tar was and the garret filled with straw, the three cribs in which lay René-Jean, Gros-Alain, and Georgette, buried in deep sleep. They carried the cradles very gently in order not to awaken the little ones.

They were simple village cribs, a sort of low osier basket which stood on the floor so that a child could get out unaided. Near each cradle Imânus placed a porringer of soup, with a wooden spoon. The escape-ladder, unhooked from its cramping-irons, had been set on the floor against the wall; Imânus arranged the three cribs, end to end, in front of the ladder. Then, thinking that a current of air might be useful, he opened wide the six windows of the library. The summer night was warm and starlight.

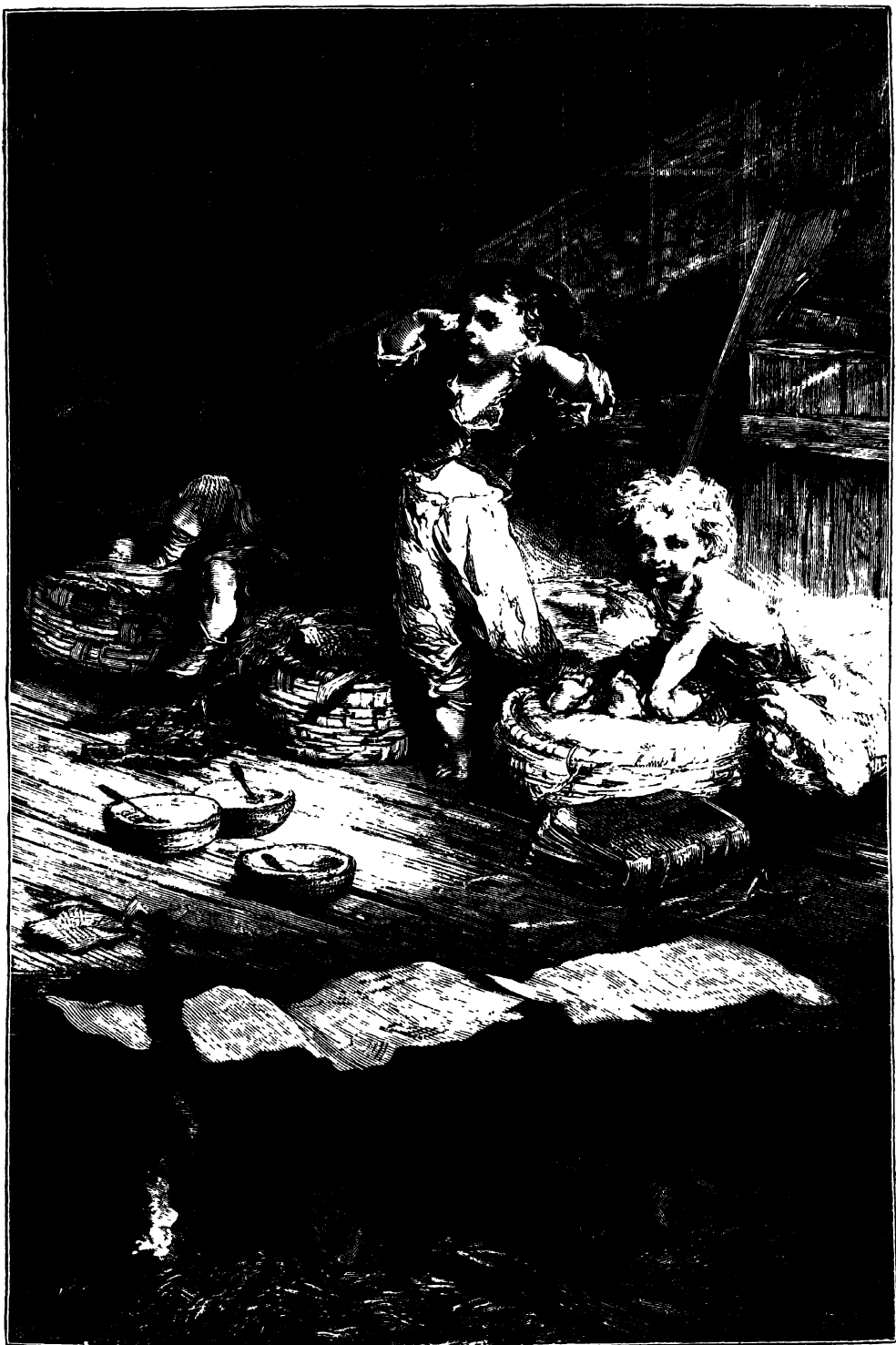
He sent the brothers Pique-en-Bois to open the windows of the upper and lower stories. He had noticed on the eastern façade of the building a great dried old ivy, the color of tinder, which covered one whole side of the bridge from top to bottom, and framed in the windows of the three stories. He thought this ivy might be left. Imânus took a last watchful glance at every thing; that done, the four men left the châtelet and returned to the tower. Imânus double-locked the heavy iron door, studied attentively the enormous bolts, and nodded his head in a satisfied way at the sulphur-match which passed through the hole he had drilled, and was now the sole communication between the tower and the bridge. This train or wick started from the round chamber, passed beneath the iron door, entered under the arch, twisted like

a snake down the spiral staircase leading to the lower story of the bridge, crept over the floor, and ended in the heap of dried fascines laid on the pool of tar. Imânus had calculated that it would take about a quarter of an hour for this wick, when lighted in the interior of the tower, to set fire to the pool of tar under the library. These arrangements all concluded, and every work carefully inspected, he carried the key of the iron door back to the marquis, who put it in his pocket.

It was important that every movement of the besiegers should be watched. Imânus, with his cowherd's horn in his belt, posted himself as sentinel on the watch-tower of the platform at the top of the tower. While keeping a constant look-out, one eye on the forest and one on the plateau, he worked at making cartridges, having near him, in the embrasure of the watch-tower window, a powder-horn, a canvas bag full of good-sized balls, and some old newspapers, which he tore up for wadding.

When the sun rose it lighted in the forest eight battalions, with sabres at their sides, knapsacks on their backs, and guns with fixed bayonets, ready for the assault; on the plateau, a battery with caissons, cartridges, and boxes of case-shot; within the fortress, nineteen men loading several guns, muskets, blunderbusses, and pistols—and three children sleeping in their cradles.





THE MASSACRE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

BOOK III

THE MASSACRE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW

I



THE children woke. The little girl was the first to open her eyes.

The waking of children is like the unclosing of flowers, a perfume seems to exhale from those fresh young souls.

Georgette, twenty months old, the youngest of the three, who was still a nursing baby in the month of May, raised her little head, sat up in her cradle, looked at her feet, and began to chatter.

A ray of the morning fell across her crib; it would have been difficult to decide which was the rosier, Georgette's foot or Aurora.

The other two still slept—the slumber of boys is heavier. Georgette, gay and happy, began to chatter.

René-Jean's hair was brown, Gros-Alain's was auburn, Georgette's blonde. These tints would change later in life. René-Jean had the look of an infant Hercules; he slept lying on his stomach, with his two fists in his eyes. Gros-Alain had thrust his legs outside his little bed.

All three were in rags; the garments given them by the battalion of the Bonnet Rouge had worn to shreds; they had not even a shirt

between them. The two boys were almost naked; Georgette was muffled in a rag which had once been a petticoat, but was now little more than a jacket. Who had taken care of these children? Impossible to say. Not a mother. These savage peasant fighters, who dragged them along from forest to forest, had given them their portion of soup. That was all. The little ones lived as they could. They had everybody for master, and nobody for father. But even about the rags of childhood there hangs a halo. These three tiny creatures were lovely.

Georgette prattled.

A bird sings—a child prattles—but it is the same hymn; hymn indistinct, inarticulate, but full of profound meaning. The child, unlike the bird, has the sombre destiny of humanity before it. This thought saddens any man who listens to the joyous song of a child. The most sublime psalm that can be heard on this earth is the lisping of a human soul from the lips of childhood. This confused murmur of thought, which is as yet only instinct, holds a strange, unreasoning appeal to eternal justice; perchance it is a protest against life while standing on its threshold; a protest unconscious, yet heart-rending; this ignorance, smiling at infinity, lays upon all creation the burden of the destiny which shall be offered to this feeble, unarmed creature. If unhappiness comes, it seems like a betrayal of confidence.

The babble of an infant is more and less than speech; it is not measured, and yet it is a song; not syllables, and yet a language; a murmur that began in heaven, and will not finish on earth; it commenced before human birth, and will continue in the sphere beyond! These lisplings are the echo of what the child said when he was an angel, and of what he will say when he enters eternity. The cradle has a Yesterday, just as the grave has a To-morrow; this morrow and this yesterday join their double mystery in that incomprehensible warbling, and there is no such proof of God, of eternity, and the duality of destiny, as in this awe-inspiring shadow flung across that flower-like soul.

There was nothing saddening in Georgette's prattle; her whole lovely face was a smile. Her mouth smiled, her eyes smiled, the dimples in her cheeks smiled. There was a serene acceptance of the morning in this smile. The soul has faith in the sunlight. The sky was blue, warm, beautiful. This frail creature, who knew nothing, who comprehended nothing, softly cradled in a dream which was not thought, felt herself in safety amidst the loveliness of nature, these sturdy trees, this pure verdure, this landscape fair and peaceful, with its noises of birds, brooks, insects, leaves, above which glowed the brightness of the sun.

After Georgette, René-Jean, the eldest, who was past four, awoke. He sat up, jumped in a manly way over the side of his cradle, found out

the porringer, considered that quite natural, and so sat down on the floor and began to eat his soup.

Georgette's prattle had not awakened Gros-Alain, but at the sound of the spoon in the porringer, he turned over with a start, and opened his eyes. Gros-Alain was the one of three years old. He saw his bowl. He had only to stretch out his arm and take it; so, without leaving his bed, he followed René-Jean's example, seized the spoon in his little fist, and began to eat, holding the bowl on his knees.



Georgette did not hear them; the modulations of her voice seemed measured by the cradling of a dream. Her great eyes, gazing upward, were divine. No matter how dark the ceiling in the vault above a child's head, Heaven is reflected in its eyes.

When René-Jean had finished his portion, he scraped the bottom of the bowl with his spoon, sighed, and said with dignity, "I have eaten my soup."

This roused Georgette from her reverie.

"Thoup!" said she.

Seeing that René-Jean had eaten, and that Gros-Alain was eating,

she took the porringer which was placed by her cradle, and began to eat in her turn, not without carrying the spoon to her ear much oftener than to her mouth.

From time to time she renounced civilization, and ate with her fingers.

When Gros-Alain had scraped the bottom of his porringer too, he leaped out of bed and joined his brother.



II



SUDDENLY from without, down below, on the side of the forest, came the stern, loud ring of a trumpet.

To this clarion-blast a horn from the top of the tower replied.

This time it was the clarion which called, and the horn which made answer.

The clarion blew a second summons, and the horn again replied.

Then from the edge of the forest rose a voice, distant but clear, which cried thus :

"Brigands, a summons ! If at sunset you have not surrendered at discretion, we commence the attack."

A voice, which sounded like the roar of a wild animal, responded from the summit of the tower :

"Attack !"

The voice from below resumed :

"A cannon will be fired, as a last warning, half an hour before the assault."

The voice from on high repeated :

"Attack !"

These voices did not reach the children, but the trumpet and the horn rose loud and clear. At the first sound of the clarion, Georgette lifted her head, and stopped eating ; at the sound of the horn, she dropped her spoon into the porringer ; at the second blast of the trumpet, she lifted the little forefinger of her right hand, and, raising and depressing it in turn, marked the cadences of the flourish which prolonged the blast. When the trumpet and the horn ceased, she remained with her finger pensively lifted, and murmured, in a half-voice, "Muthic."

We suppose that she wished to say, "Music."

The two elders, René-Jean and Gros-Alain, had paid no attention to

the trumpet and horn; they were absorbed by something else; a wood-louse was just making a journey across the library-floor.

Gros-Alain perceived it, and cried:

"There is a little creature!"

René-Jean ran up.

Gros-Alain continued:

"It stings."

"Do not hurt it," said René-Jean.

And both remained watching the traveler.



Georgette proceeded to finish her soup; that done, she looked about for her brothers. René-Jean and Gros-Alain were in the recess of one of the windows, gravely stooping over the wood-louse, their foreheads touching, their curls mingling. They held their breath in wonder, and examined the insect, which had stopped, and did not attempt to move, though not appreciating the admiration it received.

Georgette, seeing that her brothers were watching something, must needs know what it was. It was not an easy matter to reach them—still she undertook the journey. The way was full of difficulties; there were things scattered over the floor. There were footstools overturned, heaps of old papers, packing-cases, forced open and empty; trunks, rubbish of all sorts, in and out of which it was necessary to sail—a whole archipelago of reefs—but Georgette risked it. The first task was to get out of her crib; then she entered the chain of reefs, twisted herself through the straits, pushed a footstool aside, crept between two coffers, got over a heap of papers, climbing up one side and rolling down the other, regardless of the exposure to her poor little naked legs, and suc-

ceeded in reaching what a sailor would have called an open sea, that is, a sufficiently wide space of the floor which was not littered over, and where there were no more perils; then she bounded forward, traversed this space, which was the whole width of the room, on all fours with the agility of a kitten, and got near to the window. There a fresh and formidable obstacle encountered her; the great ladder lying along the wall reached to this window, the end of it passing a little beyond the corner of the recess. It formed between Georgette and her brothers a sort of cape, which must be crossed. She stopped and meditated; her internal monologue ended, she came to a decision. She resolutely twisted her rosy fingers about one of the rungs, which were vertical, as the ladder lay along its side. She tried to raise herself on her feet, and fell back; she began again, and fell a second time; the third effort was successful. Then, standing up, she caught hold of the rounds in succession, and walked the length of the ladder. When she reached the extremity there was nothing more to support her. She tottered, but seizing in her two hands the end of one of the great poles, which held the rungs, she rose again, doubled the promontory, looked at René-Jean and Gros-Alain, and began to laugh.

III



AT that instant, René-Jean, satisfied with the result of his investigations of the wood-louse, raised his head, and announced, "'Tis a she-creature."

Georgette's laughter made René-Jean laugh, and René-Jean's laughter made Gros-Alain laugh.

Georgette seated herself beside her brothers, the recess forming a



sort of little reception chamber, but their guest, the wood-louse, had disappeared.

He had taken advantage of Georgette's laughter to hide himself in a crack of the floor.

Other incidents followed the wood-louse's visit.

First, a flock of swallows passed.

They probably had their nests under the edge of the overhanging roof. They flew close to the window, a little startled by the sight of the children, describing great circles in the air, and uttering their melodious spring song. The sound made the three little ones look up, and the wood-louse was forgotten.

Georgette pointed her finger toward the swallows, and cried, "Chicks!"

René-Jean reprimanded her. "Miss, you must not say 'chicks'; they are birds."

"Birz," repeated Georgette.

And all three sat and watched the swallows.

Then a bee entered. There is nothing so like a soul as a bee. It goes from flower to flower as a soul from star to star, and gathers honey as the soul does light.

This visitor made a great noise as it came in; it buzzed at the top of its voice, seeming to say, "I have come. I have first been to see the roses, now I come to see the children. What is going on here?"



A bee is a housewife—its song is a grumble. The children did not take their eyes off the new-comer as long as it staid with them.

The bee explored the library, runnaged in the corners, fluttered about with the air of being at home in a hive, and wandered, winged and melodious, from book-case to book-case, examining the titles of the volumes through the glass doors as if it had an intellect. Its exploration finished, it departed.

"She is going to her own house," said René-Jean.

"It is a beast," said Gros-Alain.

"No," replied René-Jean, "it is a fly."

"A fly," said Georgette.

Thereupon Gros-Alain, who had just found on the floor a cord, with a knot in one end, took the opposite extremity between his thumb and forefinger, and made a sort of wind-mill of the string, watching its whirls with profound attention.

On her side, Georgette, having turned into a quadruped again, and recommenced her capricious course back and forward across the floor, discovered a venerable tapestry covered arm-chair, so eaten by moths that the horse-hair stuck out in several places. She stopped before this seat. She enlarged the holes, and diligently pulled out the long hairs.

Suddenly she lifted one finger; that meant, "Listen!"

The two brothers turned their heads.

A vague, distant noise surged up from without; it was probably the attacking camp executing some strategic manœuvre in the forest; horses neighed, drums beat, caissons rolled, chains clanked, military calls and responses; a confusion of savage sounds, whose mingling formed a sort of harmony. The children listened in delight.

"It is the good God who does that," said René-Jean.

IV

THE noise ceased.

René-Jean remained lost in a dream.

How do ideas vanish and reform themselves in the brains of those little ones? What is the mysterious motive of those memories at once so troubled and so brief? There was in that sweet, pensive little soul a mingling of ideas of the good God, of prayer, of joined hands, the light of a tender smile it had formerly known and knew no longer, and René-Jean murmured, half aloud, "Mamma!"

"Mamma!" repeated Gros-Alain.

"Mamma!" cried Georgette.

Then René-Jean began to leap. Seeing this, Gros-Alain leaped too. Gros-Alain repeated every movement and gesture of his brother. Three years copies four years, but twenty months keeps its independence. Georgette remained seated, uttering a word from time to time. Georgette could not yet manage sentences. She was a thinker; she spoke in apothegms. She was monosyllabic.

Still, after a little, example proved infectious, and she ended by trying to imitate her brothers, and these three little pairs of naked feet began to dance, to run, to totter amidst the dust of the old polished oak floor, beneath the grave aspects of the marble busts toward which Georgette from time to time cast an unquiet glance, murmuring "Momommes."

Probably in Georgette's language this signified something which looked like a man, but yet was not one—perhaps the first glimmering of an idea in regard to phantoms.

Georgette, oscillating rather than walking, followed her brothers, but her favorite mode of locomotion was on all-fours.

Suddenly René-Jean, who had gone near a window, lifted his head, then dropped it, and hastened to hide himself in a corner of the wall made by the projecting window recess. He had just caught sight of a

man looking at him. It was a soldier, from the encampment of Blues on the plateau, who, profiting by the truce, and perhaps infringing it a little, had ventured to the very edge of the escarpment, from whence the interior of the library was visible. Seeing René-Jean hide himself, Gros-Alain hid too; he crouched down beside his brother, and Georgette hurried to hide herself behind them. So they remained, silent, motionless, Georgette pressing her finger against her lips. After a few instants, René-Jean ventured to thrust out his head; the soldier was there still. René-Jean retreated quickly, and the three little ones dared not even breathe. This suspense lasted for some time. Finally the fear began to bore Georgette; she gathered courage to look out. The soldier had disappeared. They began again to run about and play.

Gros-Alain, although the imitator and admirer of René-Jean, had a specialty—that of discoveries. His brother and sister saw him suddenly galloping wildly about, dragging after him a little cart, which he had unearthed behind some box.

This doll's wagon had lain forgotten for years among the dust, living amicably in the neighborhood of the printed works of genius and the busts of sages. It was, perhaps, one of the toys that Gauvain had played with when a child.

Gros-Alain had made a whip of his string, and cracked it loudly; he was very proud. Such are discoverers. The child discovers a little wagon, the man an America—the spirit of adventure is the same.

But it was necessary to share the godsend. René-Jean wished to harness himself to the carriage, and Georgette wished to ride in it.

She succeeded in seating herself. René-Jean was the horse. Gros-Alain was the coachman. But the coachman did not understand his business; the horse began to teach him.

René-Jean shouted, "Say, 'Whoa!'"

"Whoa," repeated Gros-Alain.

The carriage upset. Georgette rolled out. Child-angels can shriek; Georgette did so.

Then she had a vague wish to weep.

"Miss," said René-Jean, "you are too big."

"Me big!" stammered Georgette.

And her size consoled her for her fall.

The cornice of *entablature* outside the windows was very broad; the dust blowing from the plain of heath had collected there; the rains had hardened it into soil, the wind had brought seeds; a blackberry-bush had profited by the shallow bed to grow up there. This bush belonged to the species called fox blackberry. It was August now, and

the bush was covered with berries; a branch passed in by the window, and hung down nearly to the floor.

Gros-Alain, after having discovered the cord and the wagon, discovered this bramble. He went up to it. He gathered a berry and ate.

"I am hungry," said René-Jean.

Georgette arrived, galloping up on her hands and knees.

The three between them stripped the branch, and ate all the berries. They stained their faces and hands with the purple juice till the trio of little seraphs was changed into a knot of little fauns, which



would have shocked Dante and charmed Virgil. They shrieked with laughter.

From time to time the thorns pricked their fingers. There is always a pain attached to every pleasure.

Georgette held out her finger to René-Jean, on which showed a tiny drop of blood, and, pointing to the bush, said, "Picks."

Gros-Alain, who had suffered also, looked suspiciously at the branch, and said:

"It is a beast."

"No," replied René-Jean; "it is a stick."

"Then a stick is wicked," retorted Gros-Alain.

Again Georgette, though she had a mind to cry, burst out laughing.

IN the meantime René-Jean, perhaps jealous of the discoveries made by his younger brother, had conceived a grand project. For some minutes past, while busy eating the berries and pricking his fingers, his eyes turned frequently toward the chorister's desk, mounted on a pivot, and isolated like a monument in the centre of the library. On this desk lay the celebrated volume of *Saint Bartholomew*.

It was, in truth, a magnificent and priceless folio. It had been published at Cologne by the famous publisher of the edition of the Bible of 1682, Blœuw, or, in Latin, Cœsius.

It was printed, not on Dutch paper, but upon that beautiful Arabian paper so much admired by Edrisi, which was made of silk and cotton and never grew yellow; the binding was of gilt leather, and the clasps of silver, the boards of that parchment which the parchment sellers of Paris took an oath to buy at the Hall Saint Mathurin, "and nowhere else."

The volume was full of engravings on wood and copper, with geographical maps of many countries; it had on a fly-leaf a protest of the printers, paper-makers, and publishers, against the edict of 1635, which set a tax on "leather, fur, cloven-footed animals, sea-fish, and paper," and at the back of the frontispiece could be read a dedication to the Gryphes, who were to Lyons what the Elzevirs were to Amsterdam. These combinations resulted in a famous copy, almost as rare as the *Apostol* at Moscow.

The book was beautiful; it was for that reason René-Jean looked at it, too long perhaps. The volume chanced to be open at a great print representing Saint Bartholomew carrying his skin over his arm. He could see this print where he stood. When the berries were all eaten, René-Jean watched it with a feverish longing, and Georgette,



THE FIRST PAGE.

following the direction of her brother's eyes, perceived the engraving, and said "Pic'sure."

This exclamation seemed to decide René-Jean. Then, to the utter stupefaction of Gros-Alain, an extraordinary thing happened. A great oaken chair stood in one corner of the library; René-Jean marched toward it, seized, and dragged it unaided up to the desk. Then he mounted thereon and laid his two hands on the volume.

Arrived at this summit, he felt a necessity for being magnificently generous; he took hold of the upper end of the "pic'sure" and tore it carefully down; the tear went diagonally over the saint, but that was not the fault of René-Jean; it left in the book the left side, one eye and a bit of the halo of the old apocryphal evangelist: he offered Georgette the other half of the saint and all his skin. Georgette took the saint, and observed, "Momonmes."

"And I!" cried Gros-Alain.

The tearing of the first page of a book by children is like the shedding of the first drop of blood by men—it decides the carnage.

René-Jean turned the leaf; next to the saint came the Commentator Pantornus. René-Jean bestowed Pantornus upon Gros-Alain.

Meanwhile Georgette tore her large piece into two little morsels, then the two into four, and continued her work till history might have noted that Saint Bartholomew, after having been flayed in Armenia, was torn limb from limb in Brittany.

VI

THE quartering completed, Georgette held out her hand to René-Jean, and said, "More!"

After the saint and the commentator followed portraits of frowning glossarists. The first in the procession was Gavantus; René-Jean tore him out and put Gavantus into Georgette's hand.

The whole group of Saint Bartholomew's commentators met the same fate in turn.

There is a sense of superiority in giving. René-Jean kept nothing for himself. Gros-Alain and Georgette were watching him; he was satisfied with that; the admiration of his public was reward enough.

René-Jean, inexhaustible in his magnanimity, offered Fabricio Pignatelli to Gros-Alain, and Father Stilting to Georgette; he followed these by the bestowal of Alphonse Tostat on Gros-Alain, and *Cornelius a Lapide* upon Georgette. Then Gros-Alain received Henry Hammond, and Georgette Father Roberti, together with a view of the city of Douai, where that father was born, in 1619. Gros-Alain received the protest of the stationers, and Georgette obtained the dedication to the Gryphes. Then it was the turn of the maps. René-Jean proceeded to distribute them. He gave Gros-Alain Ethiopia, and Lycaonia fell to Georgette. This done he tumbled the book upon the floor.

—This was a terrible moment. With mingled ecstasy and fright Gros-Alain and Georgette saw René-Jean wrinkle his brows, stiffen his legs, clench his fists, and push the massive folio off the stand. The majestic old tome was fairly a tragic spectacle. Pushed from its resting-place, it hung for an instant on the edge of the desk, seemed to hesitate, trying to balance itself, then crashed down, and broken, crumpled, torn, ripped from its binding, its clasps fractured, flattened itself miserably upon the floor. Fortunately it did not fall on the children. They were only bewildered, not crushed. Victories do not always finish so well.

Like all glories it made a great noise, and left a cloud of dust.

Having flung the book on the ground, René-Jean descended from the chair.

There was a moment of silence and fright; victory has its terrors. The three children seized one another's hands and stood at a distance, looking toward the vast dismantled tome. But, after a brief reverie, Gros-Alain approached it quickly and gave it a kick.

Nothing more was needed. The appetite for destruction grows rapidly. René-Jean kicked it, Georgette dealt a blow with her little foot which upset her, though she fell in a sitting position, by which she profited to fling herself on Saint Bartholomew. The spell was completely broken. René-Jean pounced upon the saint, Gros-Alain dashed upon him, and joyous, distracted, triumphant, pitiless, tearing the prints, slashing the leaves, pulling out the markers, scratching the binding, ungluing the gilded leather, breaking off the nails from the silver corners, ruining the parchment, making mince-meat of the august text, working with feet, hands, nails, teeth; rosy, laughing, ferocious, the three angels of prey demolished the defenseless evangelist.

They annihilated Armenia, Judea, Benevento, where rest the relics of the saint; Nathaniel, who is, perhaps, the same as Bartholomew, the Pope Gelasius, who declared the Gospel of St. Bartholomew—Nathaniel—apocryphal, all the portraits, all the maps, and the inexorable massacre of the old book, absorbed them so entirely that a mouse ran past without their perceiving it.

It was an extermination.

To tear in pieces history, legend, science, miracles, whether true or false, the Latin of the Church; superstitions, fanaticisms, mysteries, to rend a whole religion from top to bottom, would be a work for three giants, but the three children completed it. Hours passed in the labor, but they reached the end; nothing remained of Saint Bartholomew.

When they had finished, when the last page was loosened, the last print lying on the ground, when nothing was left of the book but the edges of the text and pictures in the skeleton of the binding, René-Jean sprang to his feet, looked at the floor covered with scattered leaves, and clapped his hands.

Gros-Alain clapped his hands likewise.

Georgette took one of the pages in her hand, rose, leaned against the window-sill, which was on a level with her chin, and commenced to tear the great leaf into tiny bits, and scatter them out of the casement.

Seeing this, René-Jean and Gros-Alain began the same work. They picked up and tore into small bits, picked up again and tore, and flung the pieces out of the window, as Georgette had done, page by page; rent

by these little desperate fingers, the entire ancient volume almost flew down the wind. Georgette thoughtfully watched these swarms of little white papers dispersed by the breeze, and said:

“Butterflies!”

So the massacre ended with these tiny ghosts vanishing in the blue of heaven!



VII

THUS was Saint Bartholomew for the second time made a martyr; he who had been the first time sacrificed in the year of our Lord 49.

Then the evening came on; the heat increased; there was sleep in the air; Georgette's eyes began to close; René-Jean went to his crib, pulled out the straw sack which served instead of a mattress, dragged it to the window, stretched himself thereon, and said, "Let us go to bed."

Gros-Alain laid his head against René-Jean, Georgette placed hers on Gros-Alain, and the three malefactors fell asleep.

The warm breeze entered by the open windows, the perfume of wild flowers from the ravines and hills mingled with the breath of evening; nature was calm and pitiful; every thing beamed, was at peace, full of love. The sun gave its caress, which is light, to all creation; everywhere could be heard and felt that harmony which is thrown off from the infinite sweetness of inanimate things. There is a motherhood in the infinite; creation is a miracle in full bloom; she perfects her grandeur by her goodness. It seemed as if one could feel some invisible Being take those mysterious precautions which, in the formidable conflict of opposing elements of life, protect the weak against the strong; at the same time there was beauty everywhere: the splendor equaled the gentleness. The landscape that seemed asleep had those lovely hazy effects which the changings of light and shadow produce on the fields and rivers; the mists mounted toward the clouds like reveries changing into dreams; the birds circled noisily about La Tourgue; the swallows looked in through the windows, as if they wished to be certain that the children slept well. They were prettily grouped upon one another, motionless, half-naked, posed like little Cupids; they were adorable and pure; the united ages of the three did not make nine years; they were dreaming dreams of paradise, which were reflected on their lips in vague smiles.

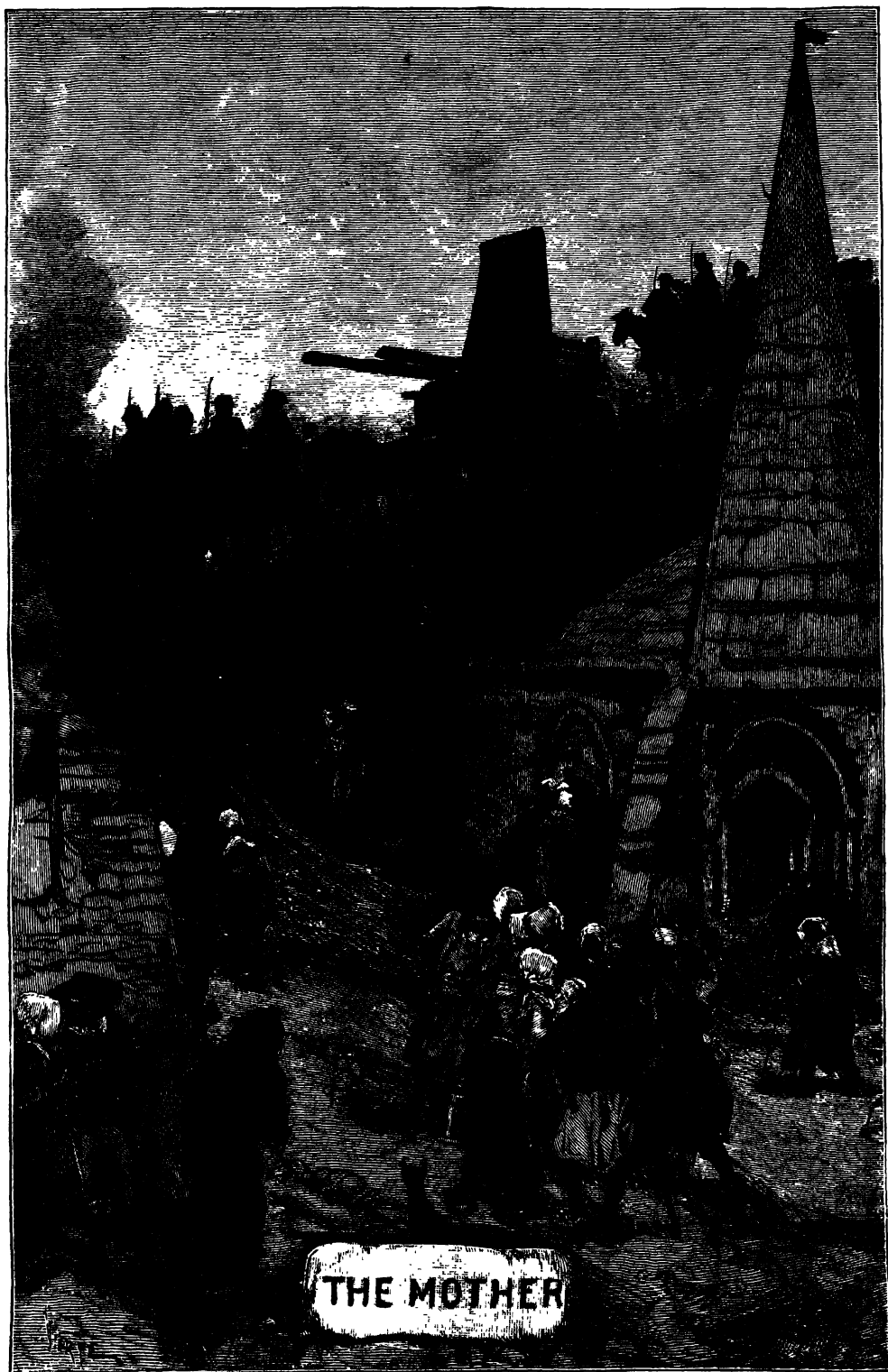
Perchance God whispered in their ears; they were of those whom all human languages call the weak and blessed; they were made majestic by innocence. All was silence about them, as if the breath from their tender bosoms were the care of the universe, and listened to by the whole creation; the leaves did not rustle; the grass did not stir. It seemed as if the vast starry world held its breath for fear of disturbing these three humble angelic sleepers, and nothing could have been so sublime as that reverent respect of nature in presence of this littleness.

The sun was near its setting; it almost touched the horizon. Suddenly, across this profound peace burst a lightning-like glare, which came from the forest; then a savage noise. A cannon had just been fired. The echoes seized upon this thundering, and repeated it with an infernal din. The prolonged growling from hill to hill was terrible. It woke Georgette.

She raised her head slightly, lifted her little finger, and said :
"Boom!"

The noise died away; the silence swept back; Georgette laid her head on Gros-Alain, and fell asleep once more.





THE MOTHER

BOOK VI

THE MOTHER

CHAPTER I

DEATH PASSES



WHEN this evening came, the mother whom we saw wandering almost at random had walked the whole day. This was indeed the history of all her days—to go straight before her without stopping. For her slumbers of exhaustion, given in to in any corner that chanced to be nearest, were no more rest than the morsels she ate here and there, as the birds pick up crumbs, were nourishment. She ate and slept just what was absolutely necessary to keep her from falling down dead.

She had passed the previous night in an empty barn; civil wars leave many such. She had found in a bare field four walls, an open door, a little straw beneath the ruins of a roof, and she had slept on the straw under the rafters, feeling the rats slip about beneath, and watching the stars rise through the gaping wreck above. She slept for several hours, then she woke in the middle of the night and set out again, in order to get over as much road as possible before the great heat of the day should set in. For any one who travels on foot in the summer midnight is more fitting than noon.

She had followed to the best of her ability the brief itinerary the

peasant of Vautortes had marked out for her; she had gone as straight as possible toward the west. Had there been any one near, he might have heard her ceaselessly murmur, half aloud, "*La Tourgue.*" Except the names of her children, this word was all she knew.

As she walked, she dreamed. She thought of the adventures with which she had met; she thought of all she had suffered, all which she had accepted; of the meetings, the indignities, the terms offered; the bargains proposed and submitted to, now for a shelter, now for a morsel of bread, sometimes simply to obtain from some one information as to her route. A wretched woman is more unfortunate than a wretched man, for she may be a prey to lust. Frightful wandering march! But nothing mattered to her, provided she could discover her children.

Her first encounter this day had been a village; the dawn was beginning to break. Every thing was still tinged with the gloom of night; a few doors were already half open in the principal streets, and curious faces looked out of the windows. The inhabitants were agitated like a disturbed bee-hive. This arose from a noise of wheels and chains which had been heard.

On the church square, a frightened group, with their heads raised, watched something descend a high hill along the road toward the village. It was a four-wheeled wagon, drawn by five horses, harnessed with chains. On this wagon could be distinguished a heap like a pile of long joists, in the middle of which lay some shapeless object, covered with a large canvas, resembling a pall. Ten horsemen rode in front of the wagon, and ten others behind. These men wore three-cornered hats, and above their shoulders rose what seemed to be the points of naked sabres. This whole cortège, advancing slowly, showed black and distinct against the horizon. The wagon looked black; the harness looked black; the horsemen looked black. Behind them gleamed the pallor of the morning.

They entered the village and moved toward the square. Daylight had come on while the wagon was going down the hill, and the cortège could be distinctly seen; it was like watching a procession of shadows, for not a man in the party uttered a word.

The horsemen were gendarmes; they did in truth carry drawn sabres. The cover was black.

The wretched wandering mother entered the village from the opposite side, and approached the mob of peasants at the moment the gendarmes and the wagon reached the square. Among the crowd voices whispered questions and replies.

"What is it?"

"The Guillotine."

"Whence does it come?"

"From Fougères."

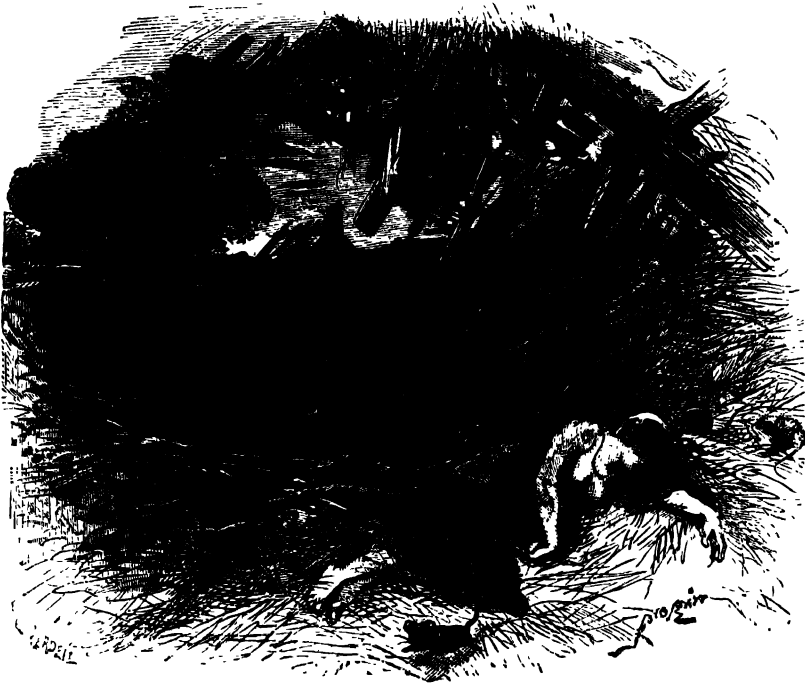
"Where is it going?"

"I do not know. They say to a castle in the neighborhood of Parigné."

"Parigné."

"Let it go where it likes, provided it does not stop here."

This great cart with its lading hidden by a sort of shroud, this



team, these gendarmes, the noise of the chains, the silence of the men, the gray dawn, all made up a whole that was spectral. The group traversed the square and passed out of the village. The hamlet lay in a hollow between two hills. At the end of a quarter of an hour, the peasants, who had stood still as if petrified, saw the lugubrious procession reappear on the summit of the western hill. The heavy wheels jolted along the ruts, the chains clanked in the morning wind, the sabres shone in the rising sun; then the road turned off, and the cortège disappeared.

It was the very moment when Georgette woke in the library by the side of her still sleeping brothers, and wished her rosy feet good-

CHAPTER II

DEATH SPEAKS

THE mother watched this mysterious procession, but neither comprehended nor sought to understand; her eyes were busy with another vision—her children, lost amidst the darkness.

She went out of the village also, a little after the cortége which had filed past, and followed the same route at some distance behind the second squad of gendarmes. Suddenly the word “guillotine” recurred to her. “Guillotine!” she said to herself. This rude peasant, Michelle Flécharde, did not know what that was, but instinct warned her; she shivered, without being able to tell wherefore; it seemed horrible to her to walk behind this thing, and she turned to the left, quitted the high-road, and passed into a wood, which was the forest of Fougères.

After wandering for some time, she perceived a belfry and some roofs; it was one of the villages scattered along the edge of the forest. She went toward it. She was hungry.

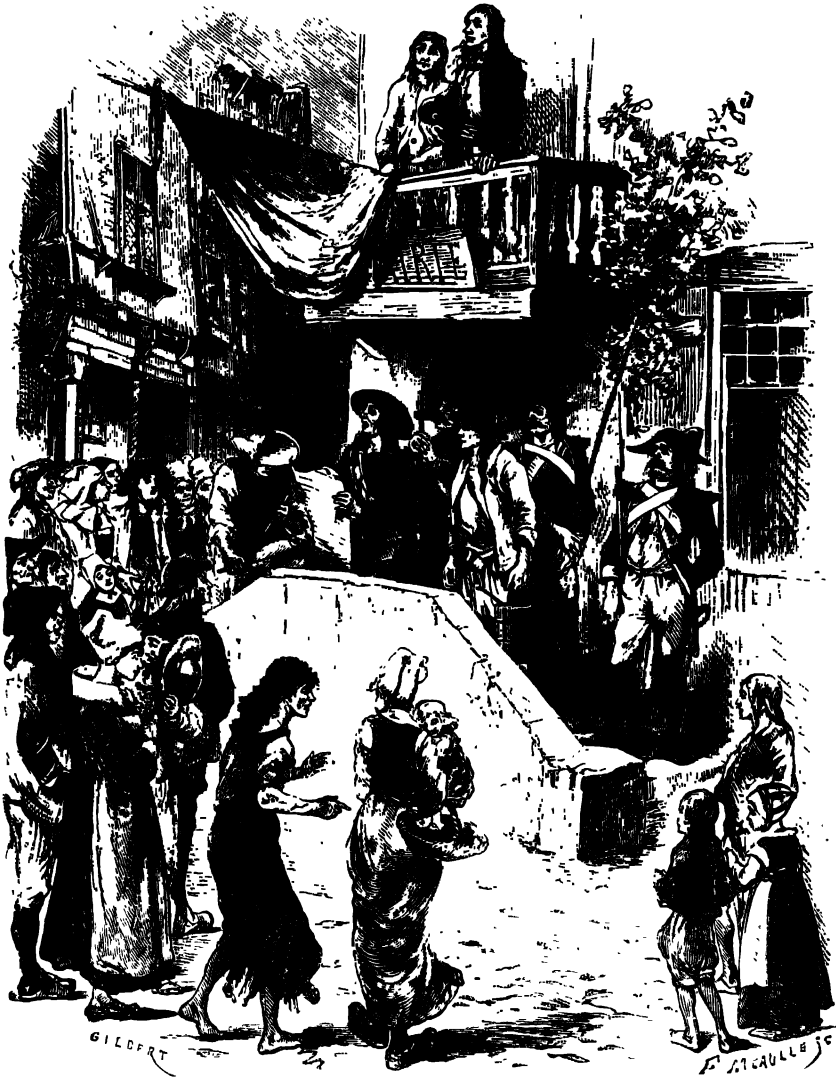
It was one of the villages in which the Republicans had established military posts.

She passed on to the square in front of the mayoralty. In this village there was also fright and anxiety. A crowd pressed up to the flight of steps. On the top step stood a man, escorted by soldiers; he held in his hand a great open placard. At his right was stationed a drummer, at his left a bill-sticker, carrying a paste-pot and brush.

Upon the balcony over the door appeared the mayor, wearing a tri-colored scarf over his peasant dress.

The man with the placard was a public crier. He wore his shoulder-belt, with a small wallet hanging from it, a sign that he was going from village to village, and had something to publish throughout the district.

At the moment Michelle Fléhard approached, he had unfolded the placard, and was beginning to read. He read, in a loud voice:



“THE FRENCH REPUBLIC—ONE AND INDIVISIBLE.”

The drum beat. There was a sort of movement among the assembly. A few took off their caps; others pulled their hats closer over their heads. At that time, and in that country, one could almost recognize the political opinions of a man by his head-gear; hats were

Royalist, caps Republican. The confused murmur of voices ceased; everybody listened; the crier read:

"In virtue of the orders we have received, and the authority delegated to us by the Committee of Public Safety——"

The drum beat the second time. The crier continued:

"And in execution of the decree of the National Convention, which puts beyond the law all rebels taken with arms in their hands, and which ordains capital punishment to whomsoever shall give them shelter, or help them to escape——"

A peasant asked, in a low voice, of his neighbor:

"What is that—capital punishment?"

His neighbor replied:

"I do not know."

The crier fluttered the placard.

"In accordance with Article 17th of the law of April 30th, which gives full power to delegates and sub-delegates against rebels, we declare outlaws——"

He made a pause, and resumed:

"The individuals known under the names and surnames which follow——"

The whole assemblage listened intently.

The crier's voice sounded like thunder. He read:

"Lantenac, brigand."

"That is monseigneur," murmured a peasant.

And through the whole crowd went the whisper: "It is monseigneur."

The crier resumed:

"Lantenac, ci-devant marquis, brigand;—Imâmus, brigand——"

Two peasants glanced sideways at each other.

"That is Gouge-le-Bruant."

"Yes; it is Brise-Bleu."

The crier continued to read the list:

"Grand Francœur, brigand——"

The assembly murmured:

"He is a priest."

"Yes; the Abbé Turneau."

"Yes; he is curé somewhere in the neighborhood of the wood of Chapelle."

"And brigand," said a man in a cap.

The crier read:

"Boisnouveau, brigand;—The two brothers, Pique-en-Bois, brigands;—Houzard, brigand——"

"That is Monsieur de Queuen," said a peasant.

"Panier, brigand——"

"That is Monsieur Sepher."

"Place Nette, brigand——"

"That is Monsieur Jamois."

The crier continued his reading without noticing these commentaries:

"Guinoiseau, brigand;—Chatenay, styled Robi, brigand——"

A peasant whispered:

"Guinoiseau is the same as Le Blond; Chatenay is from Saint Ouen."

"Hoisnard, brigand," pursued the crier.

Among the crowd could be heard:

"He is from Ruillé."

"Yes; it is Branche d'Or."

"His brother was killed in the attack on Pontorson."

"Yes; Hoisnard Malomnière."

"A fine young chap of nineteen."

"Attention!" said the crier. "Listen to the last of the list:

"Belle Vigue, brigand;—La Musette, brigand;—Sabretout, brigand;—Brin d'Amour, brigand——"

A lad nudged the elbow of a young girl. The girl smiled.

The crier continued, "Chante-en-hiver, brigand;—Le Chat, brigand——"

A peasant said, "That is Moulard."

"Tabouze, brigand——"

Another peasant said:

"That is Gauffre."

"There are two of the Gauffres," added a woman.

"Both good fellows," grumbled a lad.

The crier shook the placard, and the drum beat.

The crier resumed his reading:

"The above-named, in whatsoever place taken, and their identity established, shall be immediately put to death."

There was a movement among the crowd.

The crier went on:

"Any one affording them shelter, or aiding their escape, will be brought before a court-martial and put to death. Signed——"

The silence grew profound.

"Signed: The Delegate of the Committee of Public Safety, CIMOURDAIN."

"A priest," said a peasant.

"The former curé of Parigné," said another.

A townsman added, "Turneau and Cimourdain. A Blue priest and a White."

"Both black," said another townsman.

The mayor, who was on the balcony, lifted his hat, and cried :

"Long live the Republic !"

A roll of the drum announced that the crier had not finished.

He was making a sign with his hand. "Attention !" said he. "Listen to the last four lines of the Government proclamation. They are signed by the Chief of the exploring column of the North Coasts, Commandant Gauvain."

"Listen !" exclaimed the voices of the crowd.

And the crier read :

"Under pain of death——"

All were silent.

"It is forbidden, in pursuance of the above order, to give aid or succor to the nineteen rebels above named, at this time shut up and surrounded in La Tourgue."

"What ?" cried a voice.

It was the voice of a woman ; of the mother.

CHAPTER III

MUTTERINGS AMONG THE PEASANTS



ICHELLE FLÉCHARD had mingled with the crowd. She had listened to nothing, but one hears certain things without listening. She caught the words *La Tourgue*. She raised her head.

"What?" she repeated. "*La Tourgue!*"

People stared at her. She appeared out of her mind. She was in rags.

Voices murmured, "She looks like a brigand."

A peasant woman, who carried a basket of buckwheat biscuits, drew near, and said to her in a low voice:

"Hold your tongue!"

Michelle Fléchard gazed stupidly at the woman. Again she understood nothing. The name *La Tourgue* had passed through her mind like a flash of lightning, and the darkness closed anew behind it. Had she not a right to ask information? What had she done that they should stare at her in this way?

But the drum had beat for the last time; the bill-sticker posted up the placard; the mayor retired into the house; the crier set out for some other village, and the mob dispersed.

A group remained before the placard; Michelle Fléchard joined this knot of people.

They were commenting on the names of the men declared outlaws. There were peasants and townsmen among them; that is to say, Whites and Blues.

A peasant said:

"After all, they have not caught everybody. Nineteen are only nineteen. They have not got Riou, they have not got Benjamin Moulins, nor Goupil of the parish of Andouillé."

"Nor Lorieul of Monjean," said another.

Others added, "Nor Brice Denys."

"Nor François Dudonet."

"Yes, him of Laval."

"Nor Huet of Launey Villiers."

"Nor Grégis."

"Nor Pilon."

"Nor Filleul."

"Nor Ménécent."

"Nor Guéharrée."

"Nor the three brothers Logerais."

"Nor Monsieur Lechandelier de Pierreville."

"Idiots!" said a stern-faced, white-haired old man. "They have all if they have Lantenac."

"They have not got him yet," murmured one of the young men.

The old man added:

"Lantenac taken, the soul is taken. Lantenac dead, La Vendée is slain."

"Who, then, is this Lantenac?" asked a townsman.

A townsman replied: "He is a *ci-devant*."

Another added:

"He is one of those who shoot women."

Michelle Fléchard heard and said:

"It is true."

They turned toward her.

She went on:

"For he shot me."

It was a strange speech; it was like hearing a living woman declare herself dead. People began to look at her a little suspiciously.

She was indeed a startling object; trembling at every thing, scared, quaking, showing a sort of wild-animal trouble, so frightened that she ~~was~~ ^{was} frightful. There is always something terrible in the feebleness of a despairing woman. She is a creature who has reached the furthest limits of destiny. But peasants have not a habit of noticing details. One of them muttered:

"She might easily be a spy."

"Hold your tongue and get away from here," the good woman who had already spoken to her said in a low tone.

Michelle Fléchard replied:

"I am doing no harm. I am looking for my children."

The good woman glanced at those who were staring at Michelle, touched her forehead with one finger and winked, saying:

"She is a simpleton."

Then she took her aside and gave her a biscuit.

Michelle Flécharde, without thanking her, began to eat greedily.

"Yes," said the peasants, "she eats like an animal—she is an idiot."

So the tail of the mob dwindled away. They all went away, one after another.

When Michelle Flécharde had devoured her biscuit, she said to the peasant woman:

"Good! I have eaten. Now, where is La Tourgue?"

"It is taking her again!" cried the peasant.

"I must go to La Tourgue! Show me the way to La Tourgue!"

"Never!" exclaimed the peasant. "Do you want to get yourself killed, eh? Besides, I don't know. Oh, see here! You are really crazy! Listen, poor woman, you look tired. Will you come to my house and rest yourself?"

"I never rest," said the mother.

"And her feet are torn to pieces!" murmured the peasant.

Michelle Flécharde resumed:

"Don't I tell you that they have stolen my children? A little girl and two boys. I come from the *carriochot* in the forest. You can ask Tellmarch the *Caimand* about me. And the man I met in the field down yonder. It was the *Caimand* who cured me. It seems I had something broken. All that is what happened to me. Then there is Sergeant Radoub besides. You can ask him. He will tell thee. Why, he was the one we met in the wood. Three! I tell you three children! Even the oldest one's name—René-Jean—I can prove all that. The other's name is Gros-Alain, and the little girl's is Georgette. My husband is dead. They killed him. He was the farmer at Siseoignard. You look like a good woman. Show me the road! I am not crazy—I am a mother! I have lost my children! I am trying to find them. That is all. I don't know exactly which way I have come. I slept last night in a barn on the straw. La Tourgue, that is where I am going. I am not a thief. You must see that I am telling the truth. You ought to help me find my children. I do not belong to the neighborhood. I was shot, but I do not know where."

The peasant shook her head, and said:

"Listen, traveler. In times of revolution you mustn't say things that can not be understood; you may get yourself taken up in that way."

"But La Tourgue!" cried the mother. "Madame, for the love of the Child Jesus and the Blessed Virgin up in Paradise, I beg you,

madame, I entreat you, I conjure you, tell me which way I must go to get to La Tourgue!"

The peasant woman went into a passion.

"I do not know! And if I knew I would not tell! It is a bad place. People do not go there."

"But I am going," said the mother.

And she set forth again. The woman watched her depart, muttering, "Still, she must have something to eat."

She ran after Michelle Fléhard and put a roll of black bread in her hand.

"There is for your supper."

Michelle Fléhard took the buckwheat bread, did not answer, did not turn her head, but walked on.

She went out of the village. As she reached the last houses she met three ragged, barefooted little children. She approached them, and said:

"These are two girls and a boy."

Noticing that they looked at the bread, she gave it to them.

The children took the bread, then grew frightened.

She plunged into the forest.

CHAPTER IV

A MISTAKE



ON the same morning, before the dawn appeared, this happened amidst the obscurity of the forest, along the cross-road which goes from Javené to Lécousse.

All the roads of the Breage are between high banks, but of all the routes, that leading from Javené to Parigné by the way of Lécousse is the most deeply imbedded. Besides that, it is winding. It is a ravine rather than a road. This road comes from Vitré, and had the honor of jolting Madame de Sévigné's carriage. It is, as it were, walled in to the right and left by hedges. There could be no better place for an ambush.

On this morning, an hour before Michelle Fléhard from another point of the forest reached the first village where she had seen the sepulchral apparition of the wagon escorted by gendarmes, a crowd of men filled the copses where the Javené road crosses the bridge over the Couesnon. The branches hid them. These men were peasants, all wearing jackets of skins which the kings of Brittany wore in the sixth century and the peasants in the eighteenth. The men were armed, some with guns, others with axes. Those who carried axes had just prepared in an open space a sort of pyre of dried fagots and billets which only remained to be set on fire. Those who had guns were stationed at the two sides of the road in watchful positions. Anybody who could have looked through the leaves would have seen everywhere fingers on triggers and guns aimed toward the openings left by the interlacing branches. These men were on the watch. All the guns converged toward the road, which the first gleams of day had begun to whiten.

In this twilight low voices held converse.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, they say so."

"*She* is about to pass?"

"They say she is in the neighborhood."

"She must not go out."

"She must be burned."

"We are three villages who have come out for that."

"Yes; but the escort?"

"The escort will be killed."

"But will she pass by this road?"

"They say so."

"Then she comes from Vitré?"

"Why not?"

"But somebody said she was coming from Fougères."

"Whether she comes from Fougères or Vitré she comes from the devil."

"Yes."

"And must go back to him."

"Yes."

"So she is going to Parigné?"

"It appears so."

"She will not go."

"No."

"No, no, no!"

"Attention."

It became prudent now to be silent, for the day was breaking.

Suddenly these ambushed men held their breath; they caught a sound of wheels and horses' feet. They peered through the branches, and could perceive indistinctly a long wagon, an escort on horseback, and something on the wagon, coming toward them along the high-banked road.

* "There she is," said one, who appeared to be the leader.

"Yes," said one of the scouts; "with the escort."

"How many men?"

"Twelve."

"We were told they were twenty."

"Twelve or twenty, *we* must kill the whole."

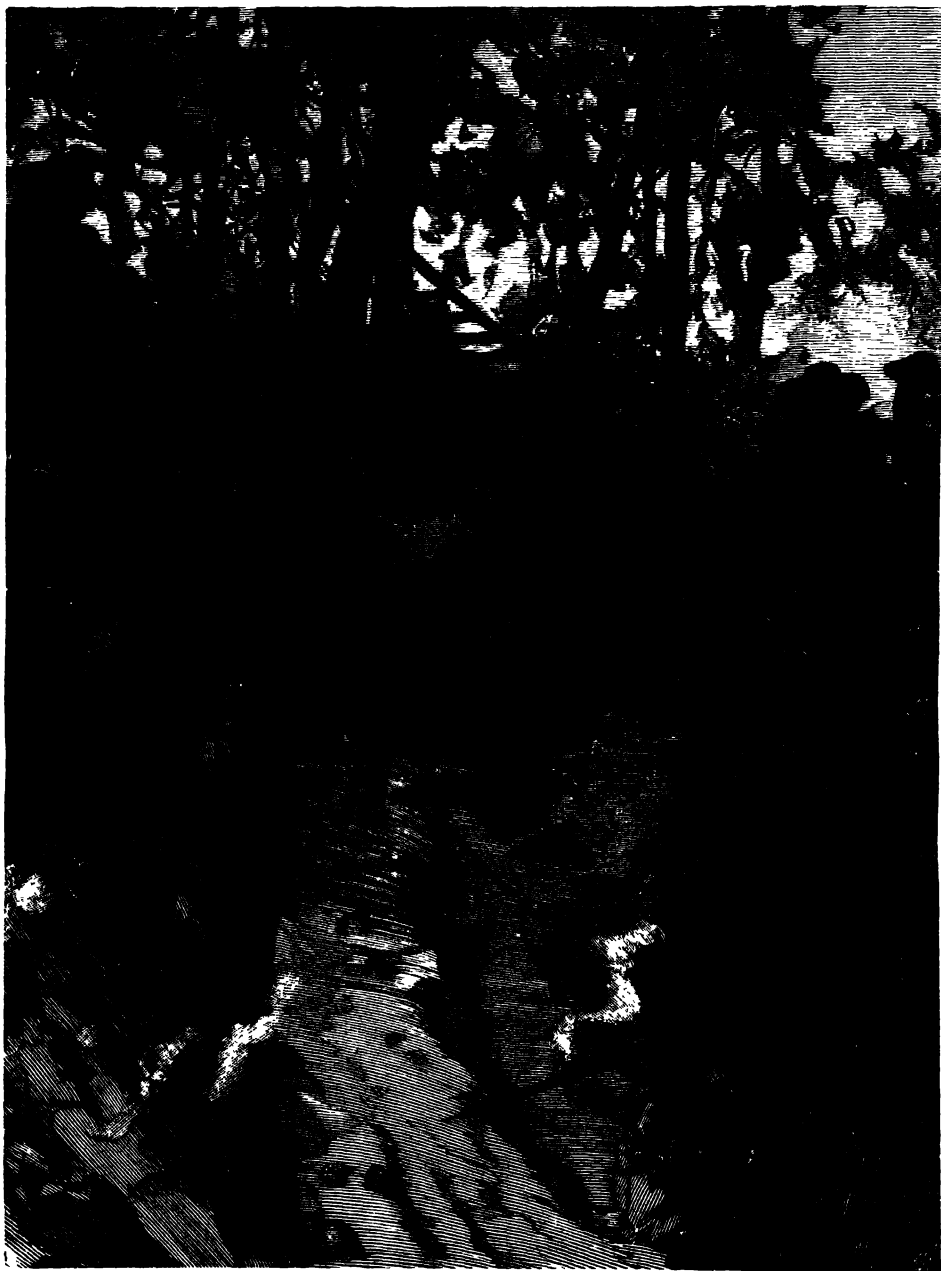
"Wait till they get within sure aim."

A little later, the wagon and its escort appeared at a turn in the road.

"Long live the king!" cried the chief peasant.

A hundred guns were fired at the same instant.

When the smoke scattered, the escort was scattered also. Seven



THE SURPRISE.

horsemen had fallen; five had fled. The peasants rushed up to the wagon.

“Hold!” cried the chief; “it is not the guillotine! It is a ladder.”

A long ladder was, in fact, all the wagon carried.

The two horses had fallen wounded; the driver had been killed, but not intentionally.

“All the same,” said the chief; “a ladder with an escort looks suspicious. It was going toward Parigné. It was for the escalade of La Tourgue, very sure.”

“Let us burn the ladder!” cried the peasants.

And they burned the ladder.

As for the funereal wagon for which they had been waiting, it was pursuing another road, and was already two leagues off, in the village where Michelle Fléhard saw it pass at sunrise.

CHAPTER V

VOX IN DESERTO



WHEN Michelle Fléhard left the three children to whom she had given her bread, she took her way at random through the wood.

Since nobody would point out the road, she must find it out for herself. Now and then she sat down, then rose, then re-seated herself again. She was borne down by that terrible fatigue which first attacks the muscles, then passes into the bones—weariness like that of a slave. She was a slave in truth. The slave of her lost children. She must find them; each instant that elapsed might be to their hurt; whoso has a duty like this woman's has no rights; it is forbidden even to stop to take breath. But she was very tired. In the extreme of exhaustion which she had reached, another step became a question. Can one make it? She had walked all the day, encountering no other village, not even a house. She took first the right path, then a wrong one, ending by losing herself amidst leafy labyrinths, resembling one another precisely. Was she approaching her goal? Was she nearing the term of her Passion? She was in the *Via Dolorosa*, and felt the overwhelming of the last station. Was she about to fall in the road, and die there? There came a moment when to advance farther seemed impossible to her. The sun was declining, the forest growing dark; the paths were hidden beneath the grass, and she was helpless. She had nothing left but God. She began to call; no voice answered.

She looked about; she perceived an opening in the branches, turned in that direction, and found herself suddenly on the edge of the wood.

She had before her a valley, narrow as a trench, at the bottom of which a clear streamlet ran along over the stones. She discovered then



SHE WALKED TOWARDS THE TOWER.

she was burning with thirst. She went down to the stream, knelt by it, and drank.

She took advantage of her kneeling position to say her prayers.

When she rose she tried to decide upon a course.

She crossed the brook.

Beyond the little valley stretched, as far as the eye could reach, a plateau covered with short underbrush, which, starting from the brook, ascended in an inclined plain, and filled the whole horizon. The forest had been a solitude; this plain was a desert. Behind every bush of the forest she might meet some one; on the plateau, as far as she could see, nothing met her gaze. A few birds, which seemed frightened, were flying away over the heath.

Then, in the midst of this awful abandonment, feeling her knees give way under her, and, as if gone suddenly mad, the distracted mother flung forth this strange cry into the silence: "Is there any one here?"

She waited for an answer.

It came.

A low, deep voice burst forth; it proceeded from the verge of the horizon, was borne forward from echo to echo; it was either a peal of thunder or a cannon, and it seemed as if the voice replied to the mother's question, and that it said, "Yes."

Then the silence closed in anew.

The mother rose, animated with fresh life; there was some one; it seemed to her as if she had now some person with whom she could speak. She had just drank and prayed; her strength came back; she began to ascend the plateau in the direction whence she had heard that vast and far-off voice.

Suddenly she saw a lofty tower start up on the extreme edge of the horizon. It was the only object visible amidst the savage landscape; a ray from the setting sun crimsoned its summit. It was more than a league away. Behind the tower spread a great sweep of scattered verdure lost in the mist—it was the forest of Fougères.

This tower appeared to her to be the point whence came the thundering which had sounded like a summons in her ear. Was it that which had given the answer to her cry?

Michelle Fléhard reached the top of the plateau; she had nothing but the plain before her.

She walked toward the Tower.

CHAPTER VI

THE SITUATION



HE moment had come.

The inexorable held the pitiless.

Cimourdain had Lantenac in his hand.

The old Royalist rebel was taken in his form—it was evident that he could not escape, and Cimourdain meant that the marquis should be beheaded here—upon his own territory—his own lands—on this very spot—in sight of his ancestral dwelling-place, that the feudal stronghold might see the head of the feudal lord fall, and the example thus be made memorable.

It was with this intention that he had sent to Fougères for the guillotine which we lately saw upon its road.

To kill Lantenac was to slay the Vendée; to slay the Vendée was to save France. Cimourdain did not hesitate. The conscience of this man was quiet; he was urged to ferocity by a sense of duty.

The marquis appeared lost; as far as that went Cimourdain was tranquil, but there was a consideration which troubled him. The struggle must inevitably be a terrible one. Gauvain would direct it, and perhaps would wish to take part; this young chief was a soldier at heart; he was just the man to fling himself into the thick of this pugilistic combat. If he should be killed? Gauvain—his child! The unique affection he possessed on earth! So far fortune had protected the youth, but fortune might grow weary. Cimourdain trembled. His strange destiny had placed him here between these two Gauvains, for one of whom he wished death; for the other life.

The cannon-shot which had roused Georgette in her cradle and summoned the mother in the depths of her solitude, had done more than that. Either by accident, or owing to the intention of the man who fired the piece, the ball, although only meant as a warning, had

struck the guard of iron bars which protected the great loop-hole of the first floor of the tower, broken it and half wrenched it away. The besieged had not had time to repair this damage.

The besieged had been boastful, but they had very little ammunition. Their situation, indeed, was much more critical than the besiegers supposed. If they had had powder enough they would have blown up La Tourgue when they and the enemy should be together within it; this had been their dream; but their reserves were exhausted. They had



not more than thirty charges left for each man. They had plenty of guns, blunderbusses, and pistols, but few cartridges. They had loaded all the weapons in order to keep up a steady fire—but how long could this steady firing last? They must lavishly exhaust the resources which they required to husband. That was the difficulty. Fortunately, sinister fortune, the struggle would be mostly man to man; sabre and poniard would be more needed than fire-arms. The conflict would be rather a duel with knives than a battle with guns. This was the hope of the besieged.

The interior of the tower seemed impregnable. In the lower hall, which the mine had breached, the retirade so skillfully constructed guarded the entrance. Behind the retirade was a long table covered with loaded weapons, blunderbusses, carbines, and muskets; sabres, axes, and poniards. Since they had no powder to blow up the tower, the crypt of the oubliettes could not be utilized; therefore the marquis had closed the door of the dungeon. Above the ground-floor hall was the round chamber which could only be reached by the narrow, winding staircase. This chamber, in which there also set a table covered with loaded weapons ready to the hand, was lighted by the great loop-hole, the grating of which had just been broken by the cannon-ball. From this chamber the spiral staircase ascended to the circular room on the second floor, in which was the iron door communicating with the bridge castle. This chamber was called indifferently the *room with the iron door*, or the *mirror-room*, from numerous small looking-glasses hung to rusty old nails on the naked stones of the wall—a fantastic mingling of elegance and savage desolation.

Since the apartments on the upper floor could not be successfully defended, this mirror-room became what Manesson Mallet, the lawgiver in regard to fortified places, calls “the last post where the besieged can capitulate.” The struggle, as we have already said, would be to keep the assailants from reaching this room.

This second-floor round chamber was lighted by loop-holes, still a torch burned there. This torch, in an iron holder like the one in the hall below, had been kindled by Imânus, and the end of the sulphur-match placed near it. Terrible carefulness!

At the end of the ground-floor hall was a board placed upon trestles, which held food, like the arrangement in a Homeric cavern; great dishes of rice, furmety of black grain, hashed veal, hotchpotch, biseuits, stewed fruit, and jugs of cider. Whoever wished could eat and drink.

The cannon-shot set them all on the watch. Not more than a half-hour of quiet remained to them.

From the top of the tower Imânus watched the approach of the besiegers. Lantenac had ordered his men not to fire as the assailants came forward. He said:

“They are four thousand five hundred. To kill outside is useless. When they try to enter, we are as strong as they.”

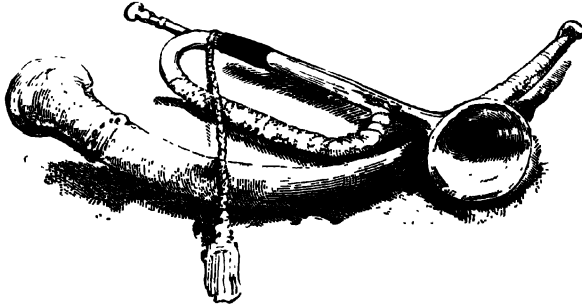
Then he laughed, and added, “Equality, Fraternity.”

It had been agreed that Imânus should sound a warning on his horn when the enemy began to advance.

The little troop, posted behind the retirade or on the stairs, waited with one hand on their muskets, the other on their rosaries.

This was what the situation had resolved itself into:

For the assailants a breach to mount, a barricade to force, three rooms, one above the other, to take in succession by main strength, two winding staircases to be carried step by step under a storm of bullets; for the besieged—to die.



CHAPTER VII

PRELIMINARIES



AUVAIN on his side arranged the order of attack. He gave his last instructions to Cimourdain, whose part in the action, it will be remembered, was to guard the plateau, and to Guéchamp, who was to wait with the main body of the army in the forest camp. It was understood that neither the masked battery of the wood nor the open battery of the plateau would fire unless there should be a sortie or an attempt at escape on the part of the besieged. Gauvain had reserved for himself the command of the storming column. It was that which troubled Cimourdain.

The sun had just set.

A tower in an open country resembles a ship in open sea. It must be attacked in the same manner. It is a boarding rather than an assault. No cannon. Nothing useless attempted. What would be the good of cannonading walls fifteen feet thick? A port-hole; men forcing it on the one side, men guarding it on the other; axes, knives, pistols, fists, and teeth—that is the undertaking.

Gauvain felt that there was no other way of carrying La Tourgue. Nothing can be more murderous than a conflict so close that the combatants look into one another's eyes. He had lived in this tower when a child, and knew its formidable recesses by heart.

He meditated profoundly. A few paces from him his lieutenant, Guéchamp, stood with a spy-glass in his hand, examining the horizon in the direction of Parigné. Suddenly he cried:

"Ah! at last!"

This exclamation aroused Gauvain from his reverie. "What is it, Guéchamp?"

"Commandant, the ladder is coming."

"The escape-ladder?"

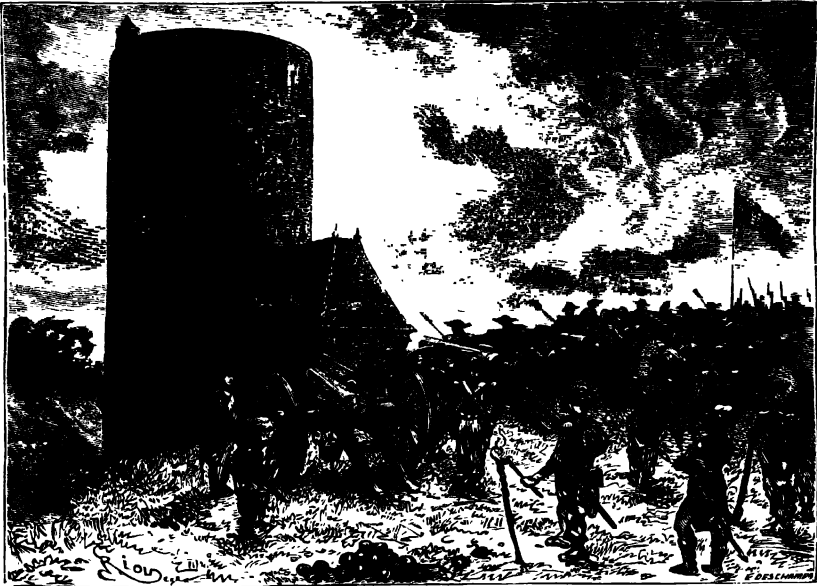
"Yes."

"How? It has not yet got here?"

"No, commandant. And I was troubled. The express that I sent to Javené came back."

"I know it."

"He told me that he had found at the carpenter's shop in Javené a ladder of the requisite dimensions—he took it—he had it put on a cart, he demanded an escort of twelve horsemen, and he saw them set out



from Parigné—the cart, the escort, and the ladder. Then he rode back full speed, and made his report. And he added, that the horses being good and the departure having taken place about two o'clock in the morning, the wagon would be here before sunset."

"I know all that. Well?"

"Well, commandant, the sun has just set, and the wagon which brings the ladder has not yet arrived."

"Is it possible? Still we must commence the attack. The hour has come. If we were to wait, the besieged would think we hesitated."

"Commandant, the attack can commence."

"But the escape-ladder is necessary."

"Without doubt."

"But we have not got it."

"We have it."

"How?"

"It was that made me say, 'Ah! at last!' The wagon did not arrive; I took my telescope, and examined the route from Parigné to La Tourgue, and, commandant, I am satisfied. The wagon and the escort are coming down yonder; they are descending a hill. You can see them."

Gauvain took the glass, and looked.

"Yes; there it is. There is not light enough to distinguish very clearly. But I can see the escort—it is certainly that. Only the escort appears to me more numerous than you said, Guéchamp."

"And to me also."

"They are about a quarter of a league off."

"Commandant, the escape-ladder will be here in a quarter of an hour."

"We can attack."

It was indeed a wagon which they saw approaching, but not the one they believed. As Gauvain turned, he saw Sergeant Radoub standing behind him, upright, his eyes downcast, in the attitude of military salute.

"What is it, Sergeant Radoub?"

"Citizen commandant, we, the men of the Battalion of the Bonnet Rouge, have a favor to ask of you."

"What?"

"To have us killed."

"Ah!" said Gauvain.

"Will you have that kindness?"

"But—that is according to circumstances," said Gauvain.

"Listen, commandant. Since the affair of Dol, you are careful of us. We are still twelve."

"Well?"

"That humiliates us."

"You are the reserve."

"We would rather be the advance-guard."

"But I need you to decide success at the close of the engagement. I keep you back for that."

"Too much."

"No. You are in the column. You march."

"In the rear. Paris has a right to march in front."

"I will think of it, Sergeant Radoub."

"Think of it to-day, my commandant. There is an opportunity.

There are going to be hard blows to give or to take. It will be lively. La Tourgue will burn the fingers of those that touch her. We demand the favor of being in the party."

The sergeant paused, twisted his mustache, and added, in an altered voice:

"Besides, look you, my commandant, our little ones are in this tower. Our children are there—the children of the battalion—our three children. That abominable beast called Brise-bleu and Imânus, this Gouge-le-Bruant, this Bouge-le-Truant, this Fouge-le-Truant, this thunder-clap of the devil, threatens our children. Our children,—our pets, commandant! If all the earthquakes should mix in the business, we can not have any misfortune happen to them. Do you hear that—authority? We will have none of it. A little while ago I took advantage of the truce, and mounted the plateau, and looked at them through a window—yes, they are certainly there—you can see them from the edge of the ravine. I did see them, and they were afraid of me, the darlings. Commandant, if a single hair of their little cherub pates should fall, I swear by the thousand names of every thing sacred, I, Sergeant Radoub, that I will have revenge out of somebody. And that is what all the battalion say; either we want the babies saved or we want to be all killed. It is our right—yes—all killed. And now, salute and respect."

Gauvain held out his hand to Radoub, and said:

"You are brave men. You shall have a place in the attacking column. I will divide you into two parties. I will put six of you in the vanguard to make sure that the troops advance, and six in the rear-guard to make sure that nobody retreats."

"Will I command the twelve, as usual?"

"Certainly."

"Then, my commandant, thanks. For I am of the vanguard."

Radoub made another military salute, and went back to his company.

Gauvain drew out his watch, spoke a few words in Guéchamp's ear, and the storming column began to form.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORD AND THE ROAR

NOW, Cimourdain, who had not yet gone to his post on the plateau, approached a trumpeter.

"Sound your trumpet!" said he.

The clarion sounded; the horn replied.

Again the trumpet and the horn exchanged a blast.

"What does that mean?" Gauvain asked Guéchamp. "What is it Cimourdain wants?"

Cimourdain advanced toward the tower, holding a white handkerchief in his hand.

He spoke in a loud voice:

"Men who are in the tower, do you know me?"

A voice—the voice of Imânus—replied from the summit:

"Yes."

The following dialogue between the two voices reached the ears of those about.

"I am the Envoy of the Republic."

"You are the late Curé of Parigné."

"I am the delegate of the Committee of Public Safety."

"You are a priest."

"I am the representative of the law."

"You are a renegade."

"I am the commissioner of the Revolution."

"You are an apostate."

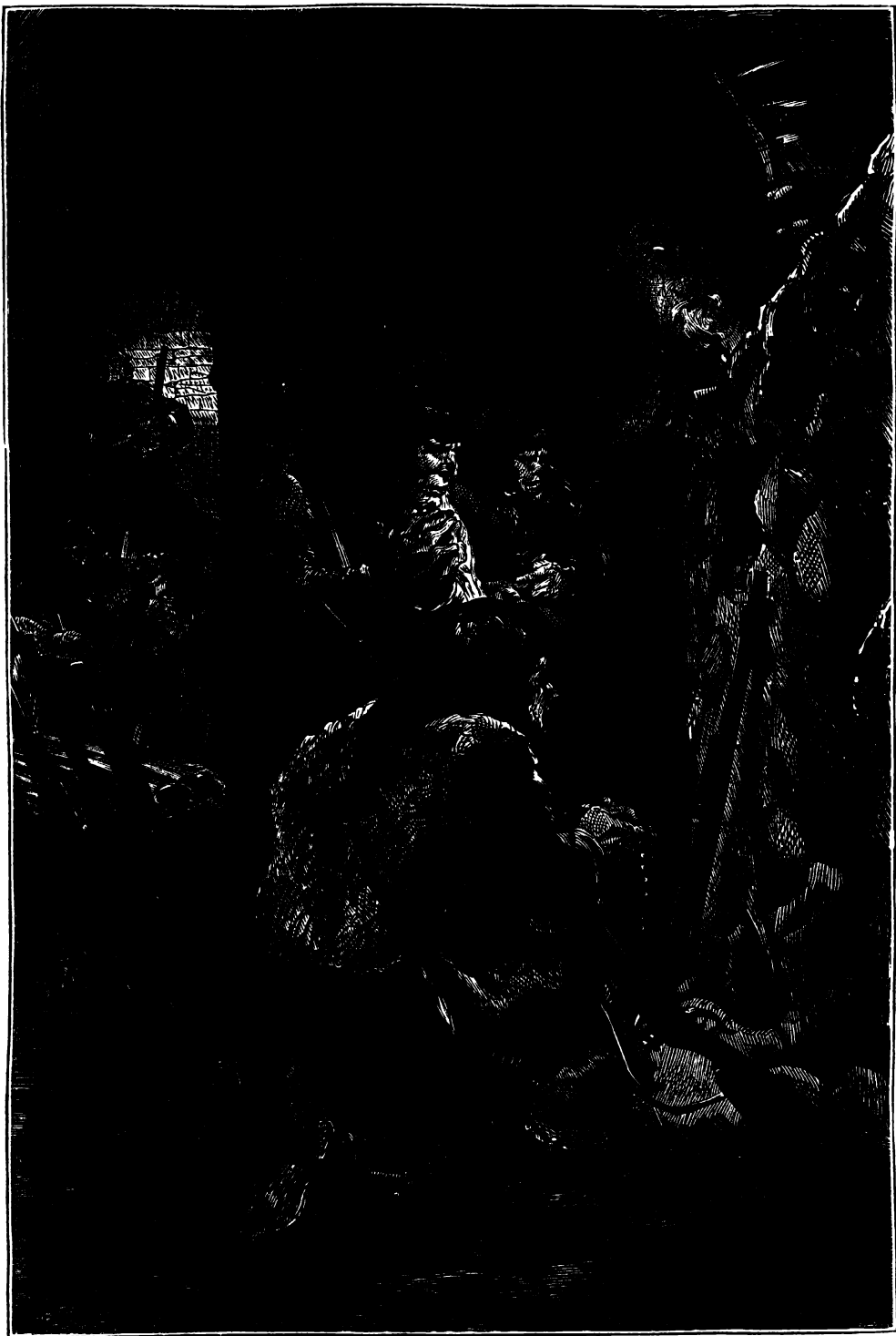
"I am Cimourdain."

"You are the demon."

"Do you know me?"

"We hate you."

"Would you be content if you had me in your power?"



‘THEY KNELT DOWN.’

"We are here eighteen, who would give our heads to have yours."

"Very well; I come to deliver myself up to you."

From the top of the tower rang a burst of savage laughter, and this cry:

"Come!"

The camp waited in the breathless silence of expectancy.

Cimourdain resumed:

"On one condition."

"What?"

"Listen."

"Speak."

"You hate me?"

"Yes."

"And I love you. I am your brother."

The voice from the top of the tower replied:

"Yes, Cain."

Cimourdain went on in a singular tone, at once loud and sweet:

"Insult me; but listen. I come here under a flag of truce. Yes, you are my brothers. You are poor mistaken creatures. I am your friend. I am the light, and I speak to ignorance. Light is always brotherhood. Besides, have we not all the same mother—our country? Well, listen to me: you will know hereafter, or your children will know, or your children's children will know that what is done in this moment is brought about by the law above, and that the Revolution is the work of God. While awaiting the time when all consciences, even yours, shall understand this; when all fanaticisms, even yours, shall vanish; while waiting for this great light to spread, will no one have pity on your darkness? I come to you; I offer you my head; I do more. I hold out my hand to you. I demand of you the favor to destroy me in order to save yourselves. I have unlimited authority, and that which I say I can do. This is a supreme instant. I make a last effort. Yes, he who speaks to you is a citizen, and in this citizen—yes—there is a priest. The citizen defies you, but the priest implores you. Listen to me. Many among you have wives and children. I am defending your children and your wives—defending them against yourselves. Oh, my brothers——"

"Go on! Preach!" sneered Imânus.

"My brothers, do not let the terrible horn sound. Throats are to be cut. Many among us who are here before you will not see to-morrow's sun; yes, many of us will perish, and you—you are all going to die. Show mercy to yourselves. Why shed all this blood, when it is useless? Why kill so many men, when it would suffice to kill two?"

"Two?" repeated Imânus.

"Yes. Two."

"Who?"

"Lantenac and myself."

Cimourdain spoke more loudly. "Two men are too many. Lantenac for us; I for you. This is what I propose to you, and you will all



have your lives safe. Give us Lantenac, and take me. Lantenac will be guillotined, and you shall do what you choose with me."

"Priest," howled Imânus, "if we had thee we would roast thee at a slow fire!"

"I consent," said Cimourdain.

He went on:

"You, the condemned who are in this tower, you can all in an hour be living, and free. I bring you safety. Do you accept?"

Imânus burst forth:

"You are not only a villain, you are a madman. Ah! why do you

come here to disturb us? Who begged you to come and speak to us? We give up monseigneur? What is it you want?"

"His head. And I offer——"

"Your skin. Oh, we would flay you like a dog, Curé Cimourdain! Well, no; your skin is not worth his head. Get away with you."

"The massacre will be horrible. For the last time—reflect."

Night had come on during this strange colloquy, which could be heard without and within the tower. The Marquis de Lantenac kept silence, and allowed events to take their course. Leaders possess such sinister egotism; it is one of the rights of responsibility.

Imânus sent his voice beyond Cimourdain; he shouted:

"Men, who attack us, we have submitted our propositions to you—they are settled—we have nothing to change in them. Accept them, else—woe to all! Do you consent? We will give you up the three children, and you will allow liberty and life to us all."

"To all, yes," replied Cimourdain, "except one."

"And that?"

"Lantenac."

"Monseigneur! Give up monseigneur? Never!"

"We can only treat with you on that condition."

"Then begin."

Silence fell.

Imânus descended after having sounded the signal on his horn; the marquis took his sword in his hand; the nineteen besieged grouped themselves in silence behind the retirade of the lower hall and sank upon their knees. They could hear the measured tread of the column as it advanced toward the tower in the gloom. The sound came nearer. Suddenly they heard it close to them, at the very mouth of the breach. Then all, kneeling, aimed their guns and blunderbusses across the openings of the barricade, and one of them—Grand-Francoeur, who was the priest Turmeau—raised himself, with a naked sabre in his right hand and a crucifix in his left, saying, in a solemn voice:

"In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!"

All fired at the same time, and the battle began.

CHAPTER IX

TITANS AGAINST GIANTS

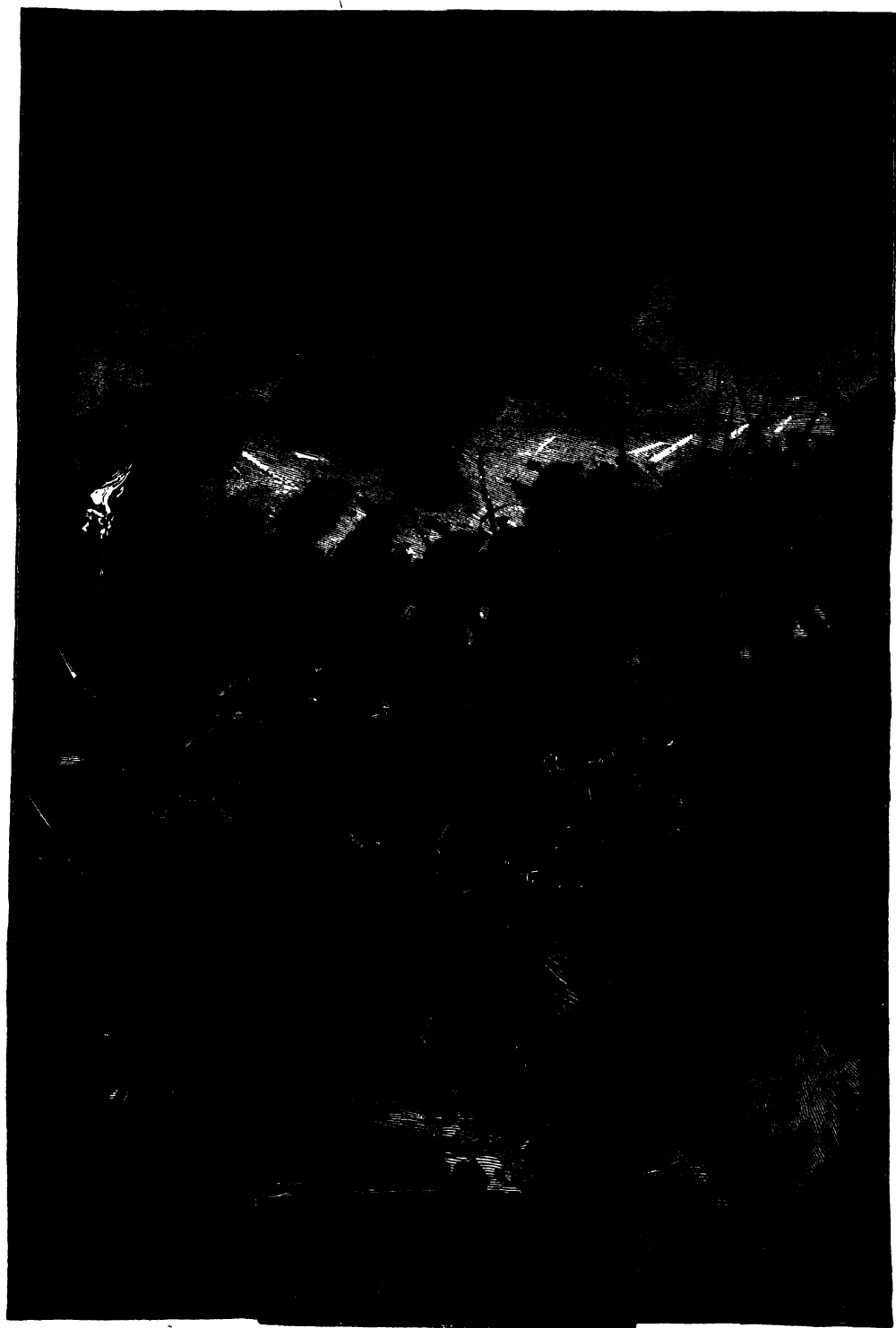
THE encounter was frightful.

This hand-to-hand contest went beyond the power of fancy in its awfulness.

To find any thing similar it would be necessary to go back to the great duels of Æschylus, or the ancient feudal butcheries, to "*those attacks with short-arms*" which lasted down to the seventeenth century, when men penetrated into fortified places by concealed breaches; tragic assaults, where, says the old sergeant of the province of Alentejo, "when the mines had done their work, the besiegers advanced bearing planks covered with sheets of tin, and armed with round shields, and furnished with grenades, they forced those who held the intrenchments, or retirades, to abandon them, and thus become masters, they vigorously drove in the besieged."

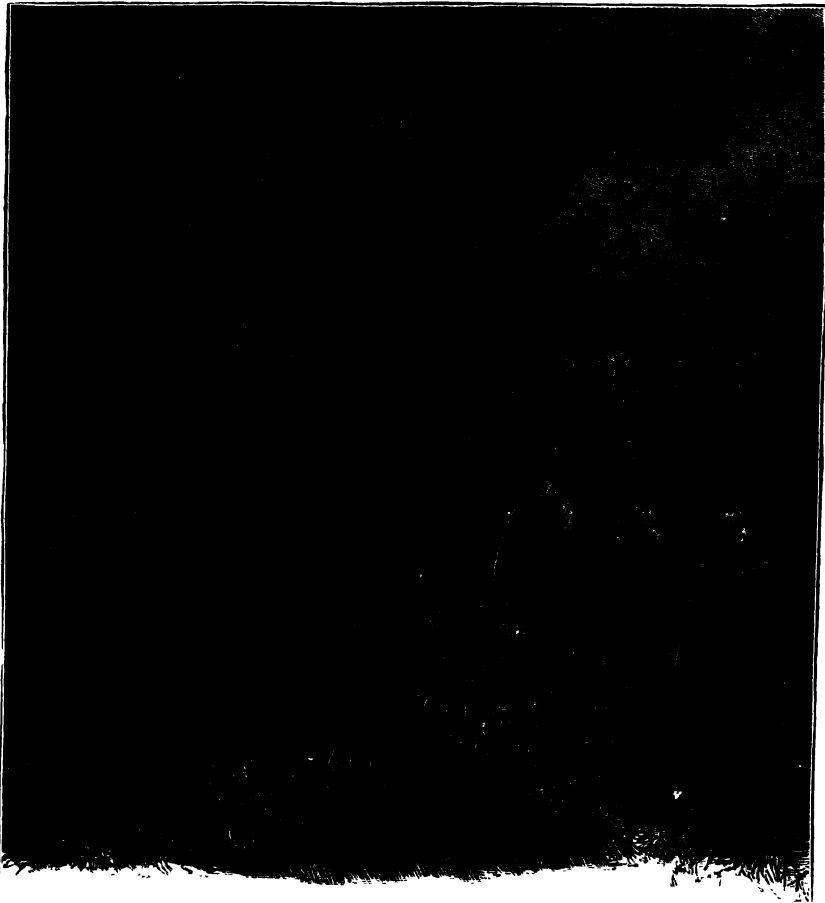
The place of attack was terrible; it was what in military language is called "a covered breach"—that is to say, a crevasse traversing the wall through and through, and not an extended fracture open to the sky. The powder had acted like an auger. The effect of the explosion had been so violent that the tower was cracked for more than forty feet above the chamber of the mine, but this was only a crack; the practicable rent which served as a breach, and gave admittance into the lower hall, resembled a thrust from a lance, which pierces, rather than a blow from an axe, which gashes. It was a puncture in the flank of the tower; a long cut, something like the mouth of a well, a passage, twisting and mounting like an intestine along the wall fifteen feet in thickness; a misshapen cylinder, encumbered with obstacles, traps, stones broken by the explosion, where any one entering struck his head against the granite rock, his feet against the rubbish, while the darkness blinded him.

The assailants saw before them this black gap, the mouth of a gulf,



which had for upper and lower jaws all the stones of the jagged wall ; a shark's mouth has not more teeth than had this frightful opening. It was necessary to enter this gap and to get out of it.

Within was the wall ; without rose the retirade. Without—that is to say, in the hall of the ground-floor.



The encounters of sappers in covered galleries when the counter-mine succeeds in cutting the mine, the butcheries in the gun-decks of vessels boarded in a naval engagement, alone have this ferocity. To fight in the bottom of a grave—it is the supreme degree of horror. It is frightful for men to meet in the death-struggle in such narrow bounds. At the instant when the first rush of besiegers entered, the whole retirade blazed with lightnings—it was like a thunder-bolt bursting underground. The thunder of the assailants replied to that of the ambuscade.

The detonations answered one another; Gauvain's voice was heard shouting, "Drive them back!" Then Lantenac's cry, "Hold firm against the enemy!" Then Imânus's yell, "Here, you men of the Main!" Then the clash of sabres clashing against sabres, and echo after echo of terrible discharges that killed right and left. The torch fastened against the wall dimly lighted the horrible scene. It was impossible clearly to distinguish any thing; the combatants struggled amidst a lurid night; whoever entered was suddenly struck deaf and blind; deafened by the noise, blinded by the smoke.

The combatants trod upon the corpses; they lacerated the wounds of the injured men lying helpless amidst the rubbish; stamped recklessly upon limbs already broken; the sufferers uttered awful groans; the dying fastened their teeth in the feet of their unconscious tormentors. Then for an instant would come a silence more dreadful than the tumult. The foes collared each other; the hissing sound of their breath could be heard; the gnashing of teeth, death-groans, curses; then the thunder would recommence. A stream of blood flowed out from the tower through the breach and spread away across the darkness, and formed smoking pools upon the grass.

One might have said that the tower had been wounded, and that the giantess was bleeding.

Strange thing, scarcely a sound of the struggle could be heard without. The night was very black, and a sort of funereal calm reigned in plain and forest about the beleaguered fortress. Hell was within, the sepulchre without. This shock of men exterminating one another amidst the darkness, these musket volleys, these clamors, these shouts of rage, all that din, expired beneath that mass of walls and arches; air was lacking, and suffocation added itself to the carnage. Scarcely a sound reached those outside the tower. The little children slept.

The desperate strife grew madder. The retirade held firm. Nothing more difficult than to force a barricade with a re-entering angle. If the besieged had numbers against them, they had at least the position in their favor. The storming-column lost many men. Stretched in a long line outside the tower, it forced its way slowly in through the opening of the breach like a snake twisting itself into its den.

Gauvain, with the natural imprudence of a youthful leader, was in the hall in the thickest of the *mêlée*, with the bullets flying in every direction about his head. Besides the imprudence of his age, he had the assurance of a man who has never been wounded.

As he turned about to give an order, the glare of a volley of musketry lighted up a face close beside him.

"Cimourdain!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"



THE BREACH.

It was indeed Cimourdain. He replied :

"I have come to be near you."

"But you will be killed!"

"Very well—you—what are you doing, then?"

"I am necessary here; you are not."

"Since you are here, I must be here too."

"No, my master."

"Yes, my child!"

And Cimourdain remained near Gauvain.

The dead lay in heaps on the pavement of the hall. Although the retirade was not yet carried, numbers would evidently conquer at last. The assailants were sheltered, and the assailed under cover; ten besiegers fell to one among the besieged, but the besiegers were constantly renewed. The assailants increased, and the assailed grew less.

The nineteen besieged were all behind the retirade, because the attack was made there. They had dead and wounded among them. Not more than fifteen could fight now. One of the most furious, Chante-en-hiver, had been horribly mutilated. He was a stubby, woolly-haired Breton; little and active. He had an eye shot out, and his jaw broken. He could walk still. He dragged himself up the spiral staircase, and reached the chamber of the first floor, hoping to be able to say a prayer there and die.

He backed himself against the wall near the loop-hole in order to breathe a little fresh air.

Beneath, in front of the barricade, the butchery became more and more horrible. In a pause between the answering discharges, Cimourdain raised his voice :

"Besieged!" cried he. "Why let any more blood flow? You are beaten. Surrender! Think—we are four thousand five hundred men against nineteen—that is to say, more than two hundred against one. Surrender!"

"Let us stop these babblings," retorted the Marquis de Lantenac.

And twenty balls answered Cimourdain.

The retirade did not reach to the arched roof; this space permitted the besieged to fire upon the barricade, but it also gave the besiegers an opportunity to scale it.

"Assault the retirade!" cried Gauvain. "Is there any man willing to scale the retirade?"

"I!" said Sergeant Radoub.

CHAPTER X

RADOUB

THEN a sort of stupor seized the assailants. Radoub had entered the breach at the head of the column, and of those men of the Parisian battalion of which he made the sixth, four had already fallen. After he had uttered that shout—"I!" he was seen to recoil instead of advance. Stooped, bent forward, almost creeping between the legs of the combatants, he regained the opening of the breach and rushed out. Was it a flight? A man like this to fly! What did it mean?

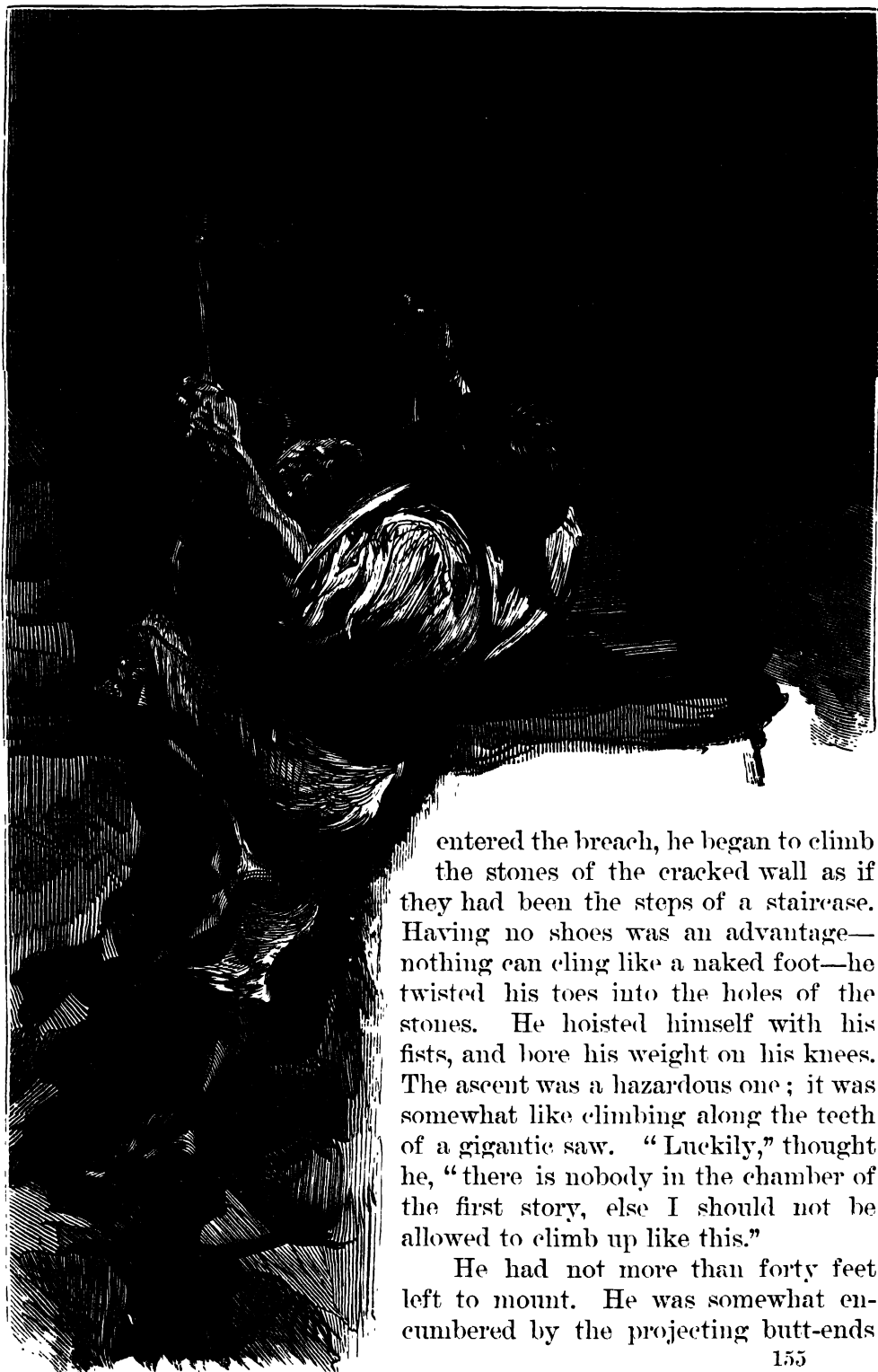
When he was outside, Radoub, still blinded by the smoke, rubbed his eyes as if to clear them from the horror of the cavernous night he had just left, and studied the wall of the tower by the starlight. He nodded his head, as if to say, "I was not mistaken."

Radoub had noticed that the deep crack made by the explosion of the mine extended above the breach to the loop-hole of the upper story, whose iron grating had been shattered, and by a ball. The net-work of broken bars hung loosely down, so that a man could enter.

A man could enter, but could he climb up? By the crevice it might have been possible for a cat to mount. That was what Radoub was. He belonged to the race which Pindar calls "the agile athletes." One may be an old soldier and a young man. Radoub, who had belonged to the French guards, was not yet forty. He was a nimble Hercules.

Radoub threw his musket on the ground, took off his shoulder-belts, laid aside his coat and jacket, guarding his two pistols, which he thrust in his trowsers'-belt, and his naked sabre, which he held between his teeth. The butt-ends of the pistols protruded above his belt.

Thus lightened of every thing useless, and followed in the obscurity by the eyes of all such of the attacking column as had not yet



entered the breach, he began to climb the stones of the cracked wall as if they had been the steps of a staircase. Having no shoes was an advantage—nothing can cling like a naked foot—he twisted his toes into the holes of the stones. He hoisted himself with his fists, and bore his weight on his knees. The ascent was a hazardous one; it was somewhat like climbing along the teeth of a gigantic saw. “Luckily,” thought he, “there is nobody in the chamber of the first story, else I should not be allowed to climb up like this.”

He had not more than forty feet left to mount. He was somewhat encumbered by the projecting butt-ends

of his pistols, and as he climbed the crevice narrowed, rendering the ascent more and more difficult, so that the danger of falling increased as he went on.

At last he reached the frame of the loop-hole and pushed aside the twisted and broken grating, so that he had space enough to pass through. He raised himself for a last powerful effort, rested his knee on the cornice of the ledge, seized with one hand a bar of the grating at the left, with the other a bar at the right, lifted half his body in front of the embrasure of the loop-hole, and, sabre between his teeth, hung thus suspended by his two fists over the abyss.

It only needed one spring more to land him in the chamber of the first floor.

But a face appeared in a loop-hole.

Radoub saw a frightful spectacle rise suddenly before him in the gloom; an eye torn out, a jaw fractured, a bloody mask.

This mask, which had only one eye left, was watching him.

This mask had two hands: these two hands thrust themselves out of the darkness of this loop-hole and clutched at Radoub; one of them seized the two pistols in his belt, the other snatched the sword from between his teeth.

Radoub was disarmed. His knee slipped upon the inclined plane of the cornice; his two fists, cramped about the bars of the grating, barely sufficed to support him, and beneath was a sheer descent of forty feet.

This mask and these hands belonged to Chante-en-hiver.

Suffocated by the smoke which rose from the room below, Chante-en-hiver had succeeded in entering the embrasure of the loop-hole: the air from without had revived him; the freshness of the night had congealed the blood, and his strength had in a measure come back. Suddenly he perceived the torso of Radoub rise in front of the embrasure. Radoub, having his hands twisted about the bars, had no choice but to let himself fall or allow himself to be disarmed; so Chante-en-hiver, with a horrible tranquillity, had taken the two pistols out of his belt and the sabre from between his teeth.

Then commenced an unheard-of duel—a duel between the disarmed and the wounded. Evidently the dying man had the victory in his own hands. A single shot would suffice to hurl Radoub into the yawning gulf beneath his feet.

Luckily for Radoub, Chante-en-hiver held both pistols in the same hand, so that he could not fire either, and was forced to make use of the sabre. He struck Radoub a blow on the shoulder with the point. The sabre-stroke wounded Radoub, but saved his life.

The soldier was unarmed, but in full possession of his strength. Regardless of his wound, which indeed was only a flesh-cut, he swung his body vigorously forward, loosed his hold of the bars, and bounded through the loop-hole.

There he found himself face to face with Chante-en-hiver, who had thrown the sabre behind him and was clutching a pistol in either hand.

Chante-en-hiver had Radoub close to the muzzle as he took aim upon his knees, but his enfeebled arm trembled, and he did not fire at once.

Radoub took advantage of this respite to burst out laughing.

"I say, ugly-face!" cried he, "do you suppose you frighten me with your bloody bullock's jaws? Thunder and Mars, how they have shattered your features!"

Chante-en-hiver took aim.

Radoub continued:

"It is not polite to mention it, but the grape-shot has dotted your mug very neatly. Bellona has disturbed your physiognomy, my lad. Come, come; spit out your little pistol-shot, my good fellow!"

Chante-en-hiver fired; the ball passed so close to Radoub's head that it carried away part of his ear. His foe raised the second pistol in his other hand, but Radoub did not give him time to take aim.

"It is enough to lose one ear!" cried he. "You have wounded me twice. It is my turn now."

He flung himself on Chante-en-hiver, knocked aside his arm with such force that the pistol went off and the ball whizzed against the ceiling. He seized his enemy's broken jaw in both hands and twisted it about. Chante-en-hiver uttered a howl of pain and fainted. Radoub stepped across his body and left him lying in the embrasure of the loop-hole.

"Now that I have announced my ultimatum, don't you stir again," said he. "Lie there, you ugly crawling snake. You may fancy that I am not going to amuse myself massacring you. Crawl about on the ground at your ease—under foot is the place for you. Die—you can't get rid of that. In a little while you will learn what nonsense your priest has talked to you. Away with you into the great mystery, peasant!"

And he hurried forward into the room.

"One can not see an inch before one's nose," grumbled he.

Chante-en-hiver began to writhe convulsively upon the floor, and utter fresh moans of agony. Radoub turned back.

"Hold your tongue! Do me the favor to be silent, citizen, without

knowing it. I can not trouble myself further with you. I should scorn to make an end of you. Just let me have quiet."

Then he thrust his hands into his hair as he stood watching Chante-en-hiver.

"But here, what am I to do now? It is all very fine, but I am disarmed. I had two shots to fire, and you have robbed me of them, animal. And with all that, a smoke that would blind a dog!"

Then his hand touched his wounded ear.

"Aïe!" he said.

Then he went on:

"You have gained a great deal by confiscating one of my ears! However, I would rather have one less of them than any thing else—an ear is only an ornament. You have scratched my shoulder, too; but that is nothing. Expire, villager—I forgive you."

He listened. The din from the lower room was fearful. The combat had grown more furious than ever.

"Things are going well down there," he muttered. "How they howl 'Live the king!' One must admit that they die bravely."

His foot struck against the sabre. He picked it up, and said to Chante-en-hiver, who no longer stirred, and who might indeed be dead:

"See here, man of the woods, I will take my sabre; you have left me that, any way. But I needed my pistols. The devil fly away with you, savage! Oh, there, what am I to do! I am no good whatever here."

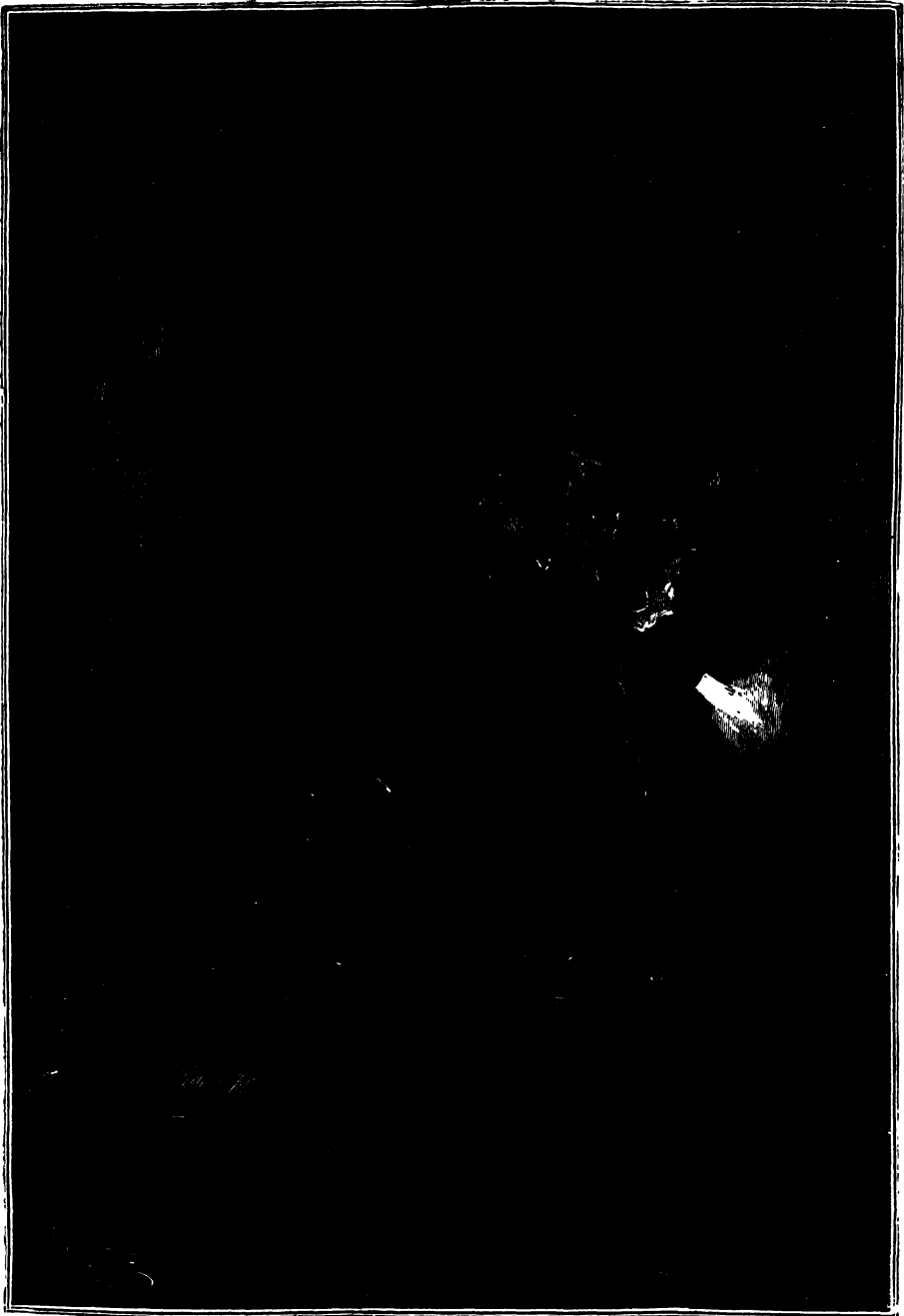
He advanced into the hall trying to guide his steps in the gloom. Suddenly, in the shadow behind the central pillar, he perceived a long table upon which something gleamed faintly. He felt the objects. They were blunderbusses, carbines, pistols, a whole row of fire-arms laid out in order to his hand; it was the reserve of weapons the besieged had provided in this chamber, which would be their second place of stand, a whole arsenal.

"A sideboard!" cried Radoub.

And he clutched them right and left, dizzy with joy.

Thus armed, he became formidable.

He could see back of the table the door of the staircase, which communicated with the rooms above and below, standing wide open. Radoub seized two pistols, and fired them at random through the doorway; then he snatched a blunderbuss, and fired that; then a blunderbuss, loaded with buckshot, and discharged it. The blunderbuss, vomiting forth its fifteen balls, sounded like a volley of grape-shot. He got his breath back, and shouted down the staircase, in a voice of thunder, "Long live Paris!"



Then seizing a second blunderbuss, still bigger than the first, he aimed it toward the staircase and waited.

The confusion in the lower hall was indescribable. This unexpected

attack from behind paralyzed the besieged with astonishment. Two balls from Radoub's triple fire had taken effect; one had killed the elder of the brothers Pique-en-Bois, the other had killed De Quélen, nicknamed Houzard.

"They are on the floor above!" cried the marquis.

At this cry the men abandoned the retirade; a flock of birds could not have fled more quickly; they plunged madly toward the staircase. The marquis encouraged the flight.

"Quick, quick!" he exclaimed. "There is most courage now in escape. Let us all get up to the second floor. We will begin again there." He left the retirade the last. This brave act saved his life.

Radoub, ambushed at the top of the stairs, watched the retreat, finger on trigger. The first who appeared at the turn of the spiral steps received the discharge of his gun full in their faces, and fell. Had the marquis been among them, he would have been killed.

Before Radoub had time to seize another weapon, the others passed him; the marquis behind all the rest, and moving more slowly.

Believing the first-floor chambers filled with the besiegers, the men did not pause there, but rushed on and gained the room above, which was the hall of the mirrors. There was the iron door; there was the sulphur-match; it was there they must capitulate or die.

Gauvain had been as much astounded as the besieged by the detonations from the staircase, and was unable to understand how aid could have reached him in that quarter; but he took advantage without waiting to comprehend. He leaped over the retirade, followed by his men, and pursued the fugitives up to the first floor.

There he found Radoub.

The sergeant saluted, and said:

"One minute, my commandant. I did that. I remembered Dol. I followed your plan. I took the enemy between two fires."

"A good scholar," answered Gauvain, with a smile.

After one has been a certain length of time in the darkness, the eyes become accustomed to the obscurity like those of a night-bird. Gauvain perceived that Radoub was covered with blood.

"But you are wounded, comrade!" he exclaimed.

"Never mind that, my commandant! What difference does it make—an ear more or less! I got a sabre thrust, too, but it is nothing. One always cuts one's self a little in breaking a window. It is only losing a little blood."

The besiegers made a halt in the first-floor chamber, which had been conquered by Radoub. A lantern was brought. C'imourdain rejoined Gauvain. They held a council. It was time to reflect, indeed. The

besiegers were not in the secrets of their foes; they were unaware of the lack of munitions; they did not know that the defenders of the tower were short of powder; that the second floor must be the last post where a stand could be made; the assailants could not tell but the staircase might be mined.

One thing was certain, the enemy could not escape. Those who had not been killed were as safe as if under lock and key. Lantenac was in the trap.

Certain of this, the besiegers could afford to give themselves time to choose the best means of bringing about the end. Numbers among them had been killed already. The thing now was to spare the men as much possible in this last assault. The risk of this final attack would be great. The first fire would without doubt be a hot one.

The combat was interrupted. The besiegers, masters of the ground and first floors, waited the orders of the commander-in-chief to renew the conflict. Gauvain and Cilmourdain were holding counsel. Radoub assisted in silence at their deliberation. At length he timidly hazarded another military salute.

“Commandant!”

“What is it, Radoub?”

“Have I a right to a little recompense?”

“Yes, indeed. Ask what you like.”

“I ask permission to mount the first.”

It was impossible to refuse him; indeed, he would have done it without permission.

CHAPTER XI

DESPERATE

WHILE this consultation took place on the first floor, the besieged were barricading the second. Success is a fury ; defeat is a madness. The encounter between the foes would be frenzied. To be close on victory intoxicates. The men below were inspired by hope, which would be the most powerful of human incentives if despair did not exist. Despair was above. A calm, cold, sinister despair.

When the besiegers reached the hall of refuge, beyond which they had no resource, no hope, their first care had been to bar the entrance. To lock the door was useless ; it was necessary to block the staircase. In a position like theirs, an obstacle across which they could see, and over which they could fight, was worth more than a closed door.

The torch which Imânus had planted in the wall near the sulphur-match lighted the room.

There was in the chamber one of those great, heavy oak chests, which were used to hold clothes and linen before the invention of chests of drawers.

They dragged this chest out, and stood it on end in the door-way of the staircase. It fitted solidly and closed the entrance, leaving open at the top a narrow space by which a man could pass ; but it was scarcely probable that the assailants would run the risk of being killed one after another by any attempt to pass the barrier in single file.

This obstruction of the entrance afforded them a respite. They numbered their company. Out of the nineteen, only seven remained, of whom Imânus made one. With the exception of Imânus and the marquis, they were all wounded.

The five wounded men (active still, for in the heat of combat any wound less than mortal leaves a man able to move about) were Cha-

tenay, called Robi; Guinoiseau, Hoisnard Branche d'Or, Brin d'Amour, and Grand-Francœur. All the others were dead.

They had no munitions left. The cartridge-boxes were almost empty; they counted the cartridges. How many shots were there left for the seven to fire? Four.

They had reached the pass where nothing remained but to fall. They had retreated to the precipice; it yawned black and terrible; they stood upon the very edge.

Still the attack was about to recommence—slowly, and all the more surely on that account. They could hear the butt-end of the muskets sound along the staircase step by step, as the besiegers advanced.

No means of escape. By the library? On the plateau bristled six cannons, with every match lighted. By the upper chambers? To what end? They gaze on the platform. The only resource when that was reached would be to fling themselves from the top of the tower.

The seven survivors of this Homeric band found themselves inexorably inclosed and held fast by that thick wall which at once protected and betrayed them. They were not yet taken, but they were already prisoners.

The marquis spoke:

"My friends, all is finished."

Then, after a silence, he added:

"Grand-Francœur, become again the Abbé Turmeau."

All knelt, rosary in hand. The measured stroke of the muskets sounded nearer.

Grand-Francœur, covered with blood from a wound which had grazed his skull, and torn away his leather cap, raised the crucifix in his right hand. The marquis, a skeptic at bottom, bent his knee to the ground.

"Let each one confess his faults aloud," said Grand-Francœur. "Monseigneur, speak."

The marquis answered, "I have killed."

"I have killed," said Hoisnard.

"I have killed," said Guinoiseau.

"I have killed," said Brin d'Amour.

"I have killed," said Chatenay.

"I have killed," said Imânus.

And Grand-Francœur replied:

"In the name of the most Holy Trinity I absolve you. May your souls depart in peace!"

"Amen," replied all the voices.

The marquis raised himself.

"Now let us die," he said.

"And kill," added Imânus.

The blows from the butt-end of the besiegers' muskets began to shake the chest which barred the door.

"Think of God," said the priest; "earth no longer exists for you."

"It is true," replied the marquis; "we are in the tomb."

All bowed their heads and smote their breasts. The marquis and the priest were alone standing. The priest prayed, keeping his eyes cast down; the peasants prayed; the marquis reflected. The coffer echoed dismally, as if under the stroke of hammers.

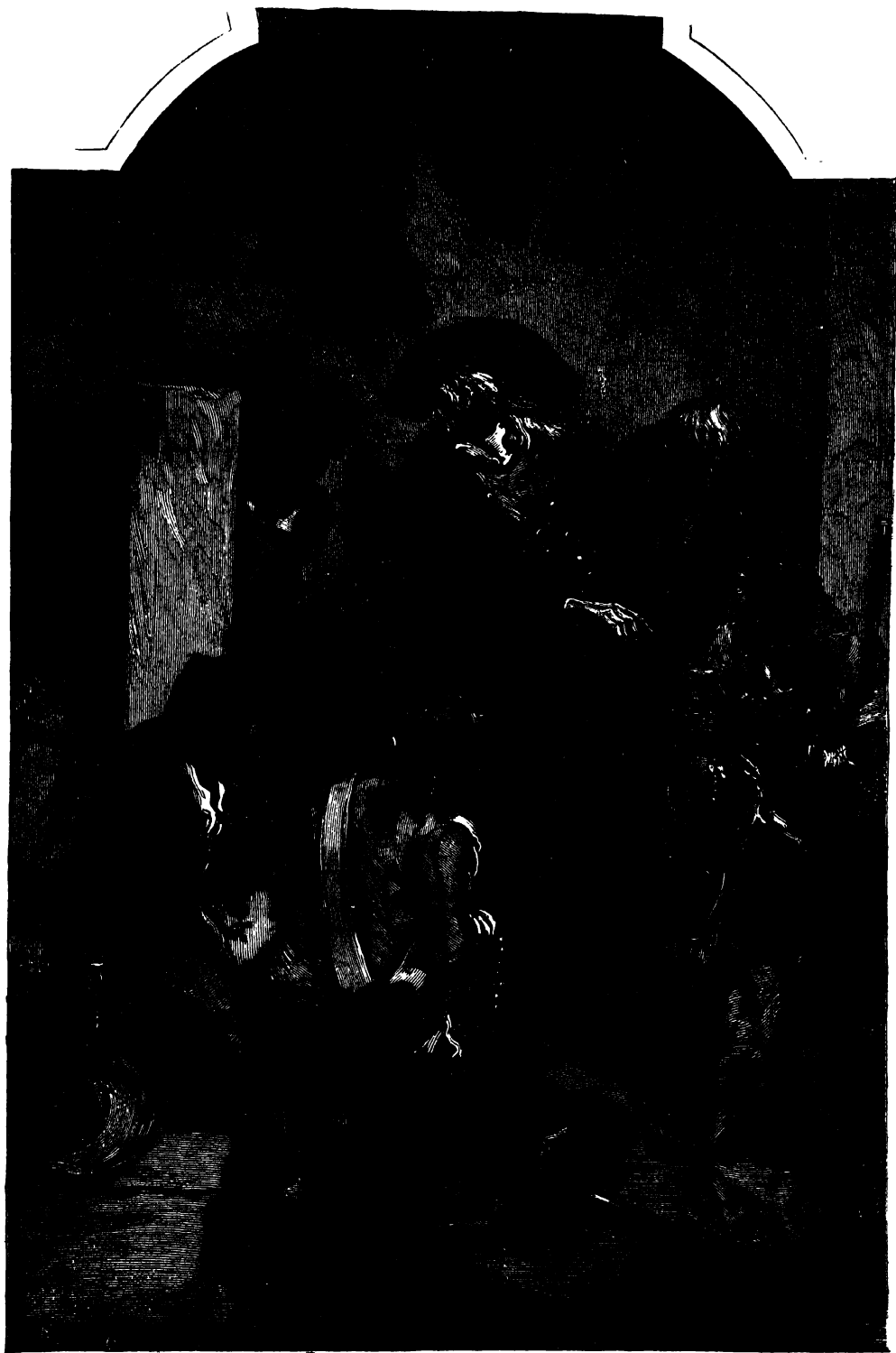
At this instant a rapid, strong voice sounded suddenly behind them, exclaiming:

"Did I not tell you so, monseigneur?"

All turned their heads in stupefied wonder. A gap had just opened in the wall.

A stone, perfectly fitted into the others, but not cemented, and having a pivot above and a pivot below, had just revolved like a turnstile, leaving the wall open. The stone having revolved on its axis, the opening was double, and offered two means of exit, one to the right and one to the left, narrow, but leaving space enough to allow a man to pass. Beyond this door, so unexpectedly opened, could be seen the first steps of a spiral staircase.

A face appeared in the opening. The marquis recognized Halmalo.



THE SECRET PASSAGE.

CHAPTER XII

DELIVERANCE



Is it you, Halmalo ?”

“It is I, monseigneur. You see there are stones that turn ; they really exist ; you can get out of here. I am just in time ; but come quickly. In ten minutes you will be in the heart of the forest.”

“God is great,” said the priest.

“Save yourself, monseigneur !” cried the men in concert.

“All of you go first,” said the marquis.

“You must go first, monseigneur,” returned the Abbé Turmeau.

“I go the last.”

And the marquis added, in a severe tone :

“No struggle of generosity. We have no time to be magnanimous. You are wounded. I order you to live and to fly. Quick ! Take advantage of this outlet. Thanks, Halmalo.”

“Marquis, must we separate ?” asked the Abbé Turmeau.

“Below, without doubt. We can only escape one by one.”

“Does monseigneur assign us a rendezvous ?”

“Yes. A glade in the forest. La Pierre Gauvaine. Do you know the place ?”

“We all know it.”

“I shall be there to-morrow at noon. Let all those who can walk meet me at that time.”

“Every man will be there.”

“And we will begin the war anew,” said the marquis.

As Halmalo pushed against the turning-stone, he found that it did not stir. The aperture could not be closed again.

“Monseigneur,” he said, “we must hasten. The stone will not move. I was able to open the passage, but I can not shut it.”

The stone, in fact, had become deadened, as it were, on its hinges from long disuse. It was impossible to make it revolve back into its place.

"Monseigneur," resumed Halmalo, "I had hoped to close the passage, so that the Blues, when they got in and found no one, would think you must have flown off in the smoke. But the stone will not budge. The enemy will see the outlet open, and can follow. At least, do not let us lose a second. Quick; everybody make for the staircase!"

Imânus laid his hand on Halmalo's shoulder.

"Comrade, how much time will it take to get from here to the forest and to safety?"

"Is there any one seriously wounded?" asked Halmalo.

They answered, "Nobody."

"In that case a quarter of an hour will be enough."

"Go," said Imânus; "if the enemy can be kept out of here for a quarter of an hour——"

"They may follow; they can not overtake us."

"But," said the marquis, "they will be here in five minutes; that old chest can not hold out against them any longer. A few blows from their muskets will end the business. A quarter of an hour! Who can keep them back for a quarter of an hour?"

"I," said Imânus.

"You, Gouge-le-Bruant?"

"I, monseigneur. Listen. Five out of six of you are wounded. I have not a scratch."

"Nor I," said the marquis.

"You are the chief, monseigneur. I am a soldier. Chief and soldier are two."

"I know we have each a different duty."

"No, monseigneur, we have, you and I, the same duty; it is to save you."

Imânus turned toward his companions.

"Comrades, the thing necessary to be done is to hold the enemy in check and retard the pursuit as long as possible. Listen. I am in possession of my full strength; I have not lost a drop of blood; not being wounded, I can hold out longer than any of the others. Fly, all of you. Leave me your weapons. I will make good use of them. I take it on myself to stop the enemy for a good half-hour. How many loaded pistols are there?"

"Four."

"Lay them on the floor."

His command was obeyed.

"It is well. I stay here. They will find somebody to talk with. Now—quick—get away."

Life and death hung in the balance; there was no time for thanks—scarcely time for those nearest to grasp his hand.

"We shall meet soon," the marquis said to him.

"No, monseigneur; I hope not—not soon—for I am going to die."

They got through the opening one after another and passed down the stairs—the wounded going first. While the men were escaping, the marquis took a pencil out of a note-book which he carried in his pocket and wrote a few words on the stone, which, remaining motionless, left the passage gaping open.

"Come, monseigneur, they are all gone but you," said Halmalo. And the sailor began to descend the stairs. The marquis followed.

Imânus remained alone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EXECUTIONER

THE four pistols had been laid on the flags, for the chamber had no flooring. Imânus grasped a pistol in either hand. He moved obliquely toward the entrance to the staircase which the chest obstructed and masked.

The assailants evidently feared some surprise—one of those final explosions which involve conqueror and conquered in the same catastrophe. This last attack was as slow and prudent as the first had been impetuous. They had not been able to push the chest backward into the chamber—perhaps would not have done it if they could. They had broken the bottom with blows from their muskets, and pierced the top with bayonet holes; by these holes they were trying to see into the hall before entering. The light from the lanterns with which they had illuminated the staircase shone through these chinks.

Imânus perceived an eye regarding him through one of the holes. He aimed his pistol quickly at the place and pulled the trigger. To his joy, a horrible cry followed the report. The ball had entered the eye and passed through the brain of the soldier, who fell backward down the stairs.

The assailants had broken two large holes in the cover; Imânus thrust his pistol through one of these and fired at random into the mass of besiegers. The ball must have rebounded, for he heard several cries as if three or four were killed or wounded, then there was a great trampling and tumult as the men fell back. Imânus threw down the two pistols which he had just fired, and, taking the two which still remained, peered out through the holes in the chest. He was able to see what execution his shots had done.

The assailants had descended the stairs. The twisting of the spiral staircase only allowed him to look down three or four steps; the men he had shot lay writhing there in the death-agony. Imânus waited.

"It is so much time gained," thought he.

Then he saw a man flat on his stomach creeping up the stairs; at the same instant the head of another soldier appeared lower down from behind the pillar about which the spiral wound. Imânus aimed at this head and fired. A cry followed, the soldier fell, and Imânus, while



watching, threw away the empty pistol and changed the loaded one from his left hand to his right.

As he did so he felt a horrible pain, and, in his turn, uttered a yell of agony. A sabre had traversed his bowels. A fist—the fist of the man who had crept up the stairs—had just been thrust through the second hole in the bottom of the chest, and this fist had plunged a sabre into Imânus's body. The wound was frightful; the abdomen was pierced through and through.

Imânus did not fall. He set his teeth together and muttered, "Good!"

Then he dragged himself, tottering along, and retreated to the iron door, at the side of which the torch was still burning. He laid his pistol on the stones and seized the torch, and while with his left hand he held together the terrible wound through which his intestines protruded, with the right he lowered the torch till it touched the sulphur-match.

It caught fire instantaneously—the wick blazed. Imânus dropped the torch—it lay on the ground still burning. He seized his pistol anew, dropped forward upon the flags, and with what breath he had left blew the wick.

The flame ran along it, passed beneath the iron door, and reached the bridge-castle.

Then seeing that his execrable exploit had succeeded—prouder, perhaps, of this crime than of the courage he had before shown—this man, who had just proved himself a hero, only to sink into an assassin, smiled as he stretched himself out to die, and muttered:

"They will remember me. I take vengeance on their little ones for the fate of our little one—the king shut up in the Temple!"

CHAPTER XIV

IMÂNUS ALSO ESCAPES



At this moment there was a great noise—the chest was hurled violently back into the hall, and gave passage to a man who rushed forward, sabre in hand, crying, “It is I—Radoub—what are you going to do? It bores me to wait. I have risked it. Any way I have just disemboweled one. Now I attack the whole of you. Whether the rest follow me or don’t follow me, here I am. How many are there of you?”

It was indeed Radoub, and he was alone!

After the massacre Imânus had caused upon the stairs, Gauvain, fearing some secret mine, had drawn back his men and consulted with Cimourdain.

Radoub, standing sabre in hand upon the threshold, sent his voice anew into the obscurity of the chamber across which the nearly extinguished torch cast a faint gleam, and repeated his question, “I am one. How many are you?”

There was no answer. He stepped forward. One of those sudden jets of light which an expiring fire sometimes sends out, and which seem like its dying throes, burst from the torch and illuminated the entire chamber. Radoub caught sight of himself in one of the mirrors hanging against the wall—approached it, and examined his bleeding face and wounded ear.

“Horrible mutilation!” said he.

Then he turned about, and, to his utter stupefaction, perceived that the hall was empty.

“Nobody here!” he exclaimed. “Not a creature.”

Then he saw the revolving stone, and the staircase beyond the opening.

“Ah! I understand! The key to the fields. Come up, all of you!”

he shouted. "Comrades, come up! They have run away. They have filed off—dissolved—evaporated—cut their lucky. This old jug of a tower has a crack in it. There is the hole they got out by, the beggars. How is anybody to get the better of Pitt and Coburg while they are able to play such comedies as this! The very devil himself came to their rescue. There is nobody here."

The report of a pistol cut his words short—a ball grazed his elbow and flattened itself against the wall.

"Aha!" said he. "So there is somebody left. Who was good enough to show me that little politeness?"

"I," answered a voice.

Radoub looked about and caught sight of Imânus in the gloom.

"Ah!" cried he. "I have got one at all events. The others have escaped, but you will not, I promise you."

"Do you believe it?" retorted Imânus.

Radoub made a step forward and paused.

"Hey, you, lying on the ground there—who are you?"

"I am a man who laughs at you who are standing up."

"What is it you are holding in your right hand?"

"A pistol."

"And in your left hand?"

"My entrails."

"You are my prisoner."

"I defy you!"

Imânus bowed his head over the burning wick, spent his last breath in stirring the flame, and expired.

A few seconds after, Gauvain and Cîmourdain, followed by the whole troop of soldiers, were in the hall. They all saw the opening. They searched the corners of the room and explored the staircase; it had a passage at the bottom which led to the ravine. The besieged had escaped. They raised Imânus—he was dead. Gauvain, lantern in hand, examined the stone which had afforded an outlet to the fugitives; he had heard of the turning-stone, but he, too, had always disbelieved the legend. As he looked he saw some lines written in pencil on the massive block; he held the lantern closer, and read these words:

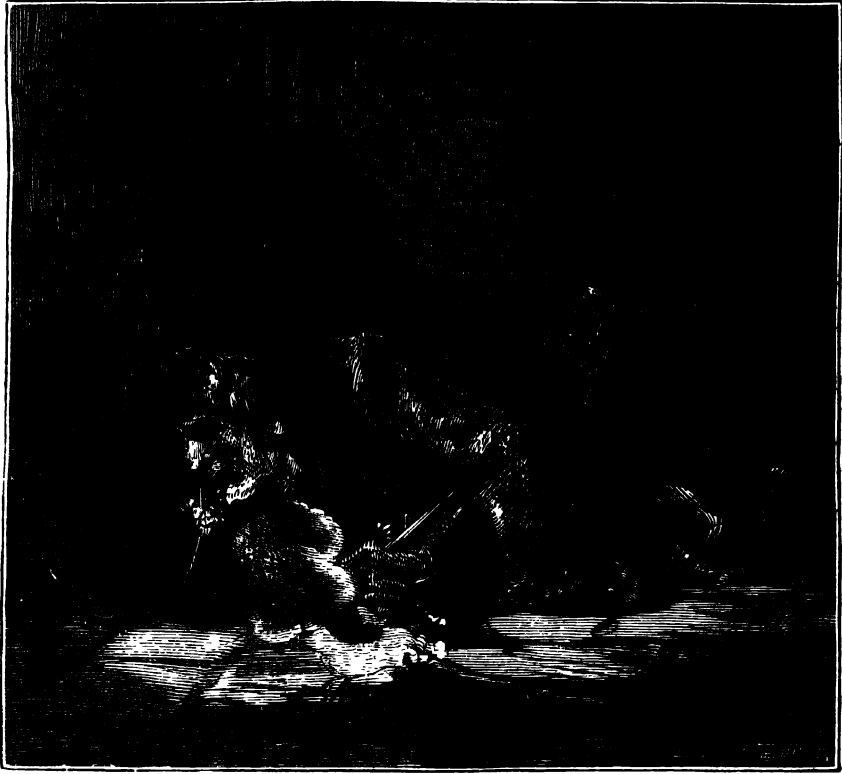
"Au revoir, Viscount.

"LANTENAC."

Guéchamp was standing by his commandant. Pursuit was utterly useless; the fugitives had the whole country to aid them—thickets—ravines—copses—the inhabitants. Doubtless they were already far

away. There would be no possibility of discovering them—they had the entire Forest of Fougères, with its countless hiding-places, for a refuge. What was to be done? The whole struggle must begin anew. Gauvain and Guéchamp exchanged conjectures and expressions of disappointment.

Cimourdain listened gravely, but did not utter a word.



"And the ladder, Guéchamp?" said Gauvain.

"Commandant, it has not come."

"But we saw a wagon escorted by gendarmes."

Guéchamp only replied:

"It did not bring the ladder."

"What did it bring, then?"

"The guillotine," said Cimourdain.

CHAPTER XV

NEVER PUT A WATCH AND A KEY IN THE SAME POCKET

THE Marquis de Lantenac was not so far away as they believed. But he was none the less in surety, and completely out of their reach. He had followed Halmalo.

The staircase by which they descended in the wake of the other fugitives ended in a narrow vaulted passage close to the ravine and the arches of the bridge. This passage gave upon a deep natural fissure which led into the ravine on one side and into the forest on the other. The windings of the path were completely hidden among the thickets. It would have been impossible to discover a man concealed there. A fugitive, once arrived at this point, had only to twist away like a snake. The opening from the staircase into the secret passage was so completely obstructed by brambles that the builders of the passage had not thought it necessary to close the way in any other manner.

The marquis had only to go forward now. He was not placed in any difficulty by lack of a disguise. He had not thrown aside his peasant's dress since coming to Brittany, thinking it more in character.

When Halmalo and the marquis passed out of the passage into the cleft, the five other men, Guinoiseau, Hoisnard, Branche-d'Or, Brin d'Amour, Chatenay, and the Abbé Turmeau were no longer there.

"They did not take much time to get away," said Halmalo.

"Follow their example," returned the marquis.

"Must I leave, monseigneur?"

"Without doubt. I have already told you so. Each must escape alone to be safe. One man passes where two can not. We should attract attention if we were together. You would lose my life and I yours."

"Does monseigneur know the district?"

"Yes."



LANTENAC IN THE FOREST.

"Monseigneur still gives the rendezvous for the Pierre Gauvaine?"

"To-morrow. At noon."

"I shall be there. We shall all be there."

Then Halmalo burst out :

"Ah, monseigneur! When I think that we were together in the open sea, that we were alone, that I wanted to kill you, that you were my master, that you could have told me so, and that you did not speak! What a man you are!"

The marquis replied :

"England! There is no other resource. In fifteen days the English must be in France."

"I have much to tell monseigneur. I obeyed his orders."

"We will talk of all that to-morrow."

"Farewell till to-morrow, monseigneur."

"By-the-way—are you hungry?"

"Perhaps I am, monseigneur. I was in such a hurry to get here that I am not sure whether I have eaten to-day."

The marquis took a cake of chocolate from his pocket, broke it in half, gave one piece to Halmalo, and began to eat the other himself.

"Monseigneur," said Halmalo, "at your right is the ravine; at your left, the forest."

"Very good. Leave me. Go your own way."

Halmalo obeyed. He hurried off through the darkness. For a few instants the marquis could hear the crackling of the underbrush, then all was still. By that time it would have been impossible to track Halmalo. This forest of the Bocage was the fugitive's auxiliary. He did not flee—he vanished. It was this facility for disappearance which made our armies hesitate before this ever-retreating Vendée, so formidable as it fled.

The marquis remained motionless. He was a man who forced himself to feel nothing, but he could not restrain his emotion on breathing this free air after having been so long stifled in blood and carnage. To feel himself completely at liberty after having seemed so utterly lost; after having seen the grave so close, to be swept so suddenly beyond its reach; to come out of death back into life; it was a shock even to a man like Lantenac. Familiar as he was with danger, in spite of all the vicissitudes he had passed through, he could not at first steady his soul under this.

He acknowledged to himself that he was content. But he quickly subdued this emotion, which was more like joy than any feeling he had known for years.

He drew out his watch and struck the hour. What time was it?

To his great astonishment, he found that it was only ten o'clock. When one has just passed through some terrible convulsion of existence in which every hope and life itself were at stake, one is always astounded to find that those awful minutes were no longer than ordinary ones. The warning cannon had been fired a little before sunset, and La Tourgue attacked by the storming-party half an hour later—between seven and eight o'clock—just as night was falling. The colossal combat, begun at eight o'clock, had ended at ten. This whole *épopée* had only taken a hundred and twenty minutes to enact. Sometimes catastrophes sweep on with the rapidity of lightning. The climax is overwhelming from its suddenness.

On reflection, the astonishing thing was that the struggle could have lasted so long. A resistance for two hours of so small a number against so large a force was extraordinary; and certainly it had not been short or quickly finished, this battle of nineteen against four thousand.

But it was time he should be gone. Halmalo must be far away, and the marquis judged that it would not be necessary to wait there longer. He put his watch back into his vest, but not into the same pocket, for he discovered that the key of the iron door given him by Imânus was there, and the crystal might be broken against the key. Then he moved toward the forest in his turn. As he turned to the left, it seemed to him that a faint gleam of light penetrated the darkness where he stood.

He walked back, and across the underbrush clearly outlined against a red background and become visible in their tiniest outlines, he perceived a great glare in the ravine. Only a few paces separated him from it. He hurried forward, then stopped, remembering what folly it was to expose himself in that light. Whatever might have happened, after all it did not concern him. Again he set out in the direction Halmalo had indicated, and walked a little way toward the forest.

Suddenly, deep as he was hidden among the brambles, he heard a terrible cry echo over his head; this cry seemed to proceed from the very edge of the plateau which stretched above the ravine. The marquis raised his eyes and stood still.

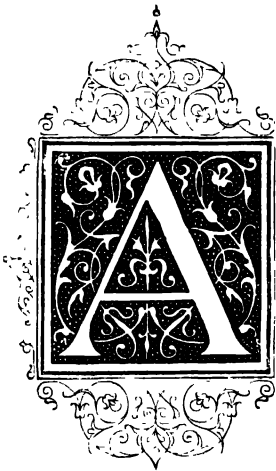


IN DÆMONE DEVS

BOOK V
IN DLEMON E DEUS

CHAPTER I

FOUND, BUT LOST



AT the moment Michelle Fléhard caught sight of the tower, she was more than a league away. She, who could scarcely take a step, did not hesitate before these miles which must be traversed. The woman was weak, but the mother found strength. She walked on.

The sun set; the twilight came, then the night. Always pressing on, she heard a bell afar off, hidden by the darkness, strike eight o'clock, then nine. The peal probably came from the belfry of Parigné. From time to time she paused to listen to strange sounds like the deadened echo of blows, which might perhaps be the wind in the distance.

She walked straight on, breaking the furze and the sharp heath-stems beneath her bleeding feet. She was guided by a faint light which shone from the distant tower, defining its outlines against the night, and giving a mysterious glow to the tower amidst the surrounding gloom. This light became more distinct when the noise sounded louder, then faded suddenly.

The vast plateau across which Michelle Fléhard journeyed was

covered with grass and heath; not a house, not a tree appeared. It rose gradually, and, as far as the eye could reach, stretched in a straight hard line against the sombre horizon where a few stars gleamed. She had always the tower before her eyes—the sight kept her strength from failing.

She saw the massive pile grow slowly as she walked on.

We have just said the smothered reports and the pale gleams of light starting from the tower were intermittent; they stopped, then began anew, offering an enigma full of agony to the wretched mother.

Suddenly they ceased; noise and gleams of light both died; there was a moment of complete silence; an ominous tranquillity.

It was just at this moment that Michelle Flécharde reached the edge of the plateau.

She saw at her feet a ravine whose bottom was lost in the wan indistinctness of the night; at a little distance, on the top of the plateau, an entanglement of wheels, metal, and harness, which was a battery; and before her, confusedly lighted by the matches of the cannon, an enormous edifice that seemed built of shadows blacker than the shadows which surrounded it. This mass of buildings was composed of a bridge whose arches were imbedded in the ravine, and of a sort of castle which rose upon the bridge; both bridge and castle were supported against a lofty circular shadow—the tower toward which this mother had journeyed from so far.

You could see lights come and go in the loop-holes of the tower, and from the noise which surged up she divined that it was filled with a crowd of men—indeed, now and then their gigantic shadows were flung out on the night.

Near the battery was a camp whose outposts Michelle Flécharde might have perceived through the gloom and the underbrush, but she had as yet noticed nothing.

She went close to the edge of the plateau, so near the bridge that it seemed to her she could almost touch it with her hand. The depth of the ravine alone kept her from reaching it. She could make out in the gloom the three stories of the bridge-castle.

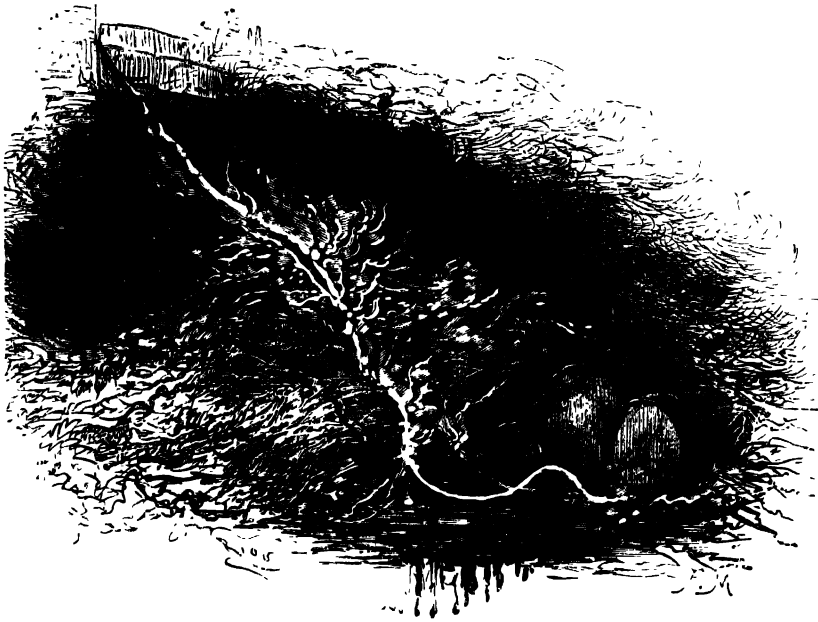
How long she stood there she could not have told, for her mind, absorbed in her mute contemplation of this gaping ravine and this shadowy edifice, took no note of time. What was this building? What was going on within? Was it La Tourgue? A strange dizziness seized her; in her confusion she could not tell if this were the goal she had been seeking on the starting-point of a terrible journey. She asked herself why she was there.

She looked; she listened.

Suddenly a great blackness shut out every object. A cloud of smoke swept up between her and the pile she was watching; a sharp report forced her to close her eyes. Scarcely had she done so, when a great light reddened the lids. She opened them again.

It was no longer the night she had before her; it was the day—but a fearful day—the day born of fire. She was watching the beginning of a conflagration.

From black the smoke had become scarlet, filled with a mighty flame, which appeared and disappeared, writhing and twisting in ser-



pentine coils. The flame burst out like a tongue from something which resembled blazing jaws; it was the embrasure of a window filled with fire. This window, covered by iron bars, already reddening in the heat, was a casement in the lower story of the bridge-castle. Nothing of the edifice was visible except this window. The smoke covered even the plateau, leaving only the mouth of the ravine black against the vermillion flames.

Michelle Flécharde stared in dumb wonder. It was like a dream—she could no longer tell where reality ended, and the confused fancies of her poor troubled brain began. Ought she to fly? Should she remain? There was nothing real enough for any definite decision to steady her mind.

A wind swept up and burst the curtain of smoke; in the opening the frowning bastille rose suddenly in view: donjon, bridge, châtelet;



dazzling in the terrible gilding of conflagration which framed it from top to bottom. The appalling illumination showed Michelle Fléhard every detail of the ancient keep.

The lowest story of the castle built on the bridge was burning.

Above rose the other two stories, still untouched, but as it were supported on a corbel of flames.

From the edge of the plateau where Michelle Fléhard stood, she could catch broken glimpses of the interior between the clouds of smoke and fire. The windows were all open.

Through the great casements of the second story, Michelle Fléhard could make out the cupboards stretched along the walls, which looked to her full of books, and by one of the windows could see a little group lying on the floor, in the shadow, indistinct and massed together like birds in a nest, which at times she fancied she saw move. She looked fixedly in this direction.

What was that little group lying there in the shadow ?

Sometimes it flashed across her mind that those were living forms ; but she had fever, she had eaten nothing since morning, she had walked without intermission, she was utterly exhausted, she felt herself giving way to a sort of hallucination which she had still reason enough to struggle against. Still her eyes fixed themselves ever more steadily upon that one point ; she could not look away from that little heap upon the floor—a mass of inanimate objects, doubtless, that had been left in that room below which the flames roared and billowed.

Suddenly the fire, as if animated by a will and purpose, flung downward a jet of flame toward the great dead ivy which covered the façade whereat Michelle Fléhard was gazing.

It seemed as if the fire had just discovered this outwork of dried branches ; a spark darted greedily upon it, and a line of flame spread upward from twig to twig with frightful rapidity. In the twinkling of an eye it reached the second story. As they rose, the flames illuminated the chamber of the first floor, and the awful glare threw out in bold relief the three little creatures lying asleep upon the floor. A lovely, statuesque group of legs and arms interlaced, closed eyes and angelic, smiling faces.

The mother recognized her children !

She uttered a terrible cry.

That cry of indescribable agony is only given to mothers. No sound is at once so savage and so touching. When a woman utters it, you seem to hear the yell of a sea-wolf ; when the sea-wolf cries thus, you seem to hear the voice of a woman.

This cry of Michelle Fléhard was a howl. Heeuba howled, says Homer.

It was this cry which reached the Marquis de Lantenac.

When he heard it he stood still.

The marquis was between the outlet of the passage through which

he had been guided by Halmalo and the ravine. Across the brambles which inclosed him he saw the bridge in flames and La Tourgue red with the reflection. Looking upward through the opening which the branches left above his head, he perceived close to the edge of the plateau on the opposite side of the gulf, in front of the burning castle, in the full light of the conflagration, the haggard, anguish-stricken face of a woman bending over the depth.

It was this woman who had uttered that cry.

The face was no longer that of Michelle Fléhard; it was a Gorgon's. She was appalling in her agony. The peasant woman was transformed into one of the Eumenides. This unknown villager, vulgar, ignorant, unreasoning, had risen suddenly to the epic grandeur of despair. Great sufferings swell the soul to gigantic proportions. This was no longer a simple mother—all maternity's voice cried out through hers; whatever sums up and becomes a type of humanity grows superhuman. There she towered on the edge of that ravine, in front of that conflagration, in presence of that crime, like a power from beyond the grave; she moaned like a wild beast, but her attitude was that of a goddess; the mouth, which uttered imprecations, was set in a flaming mask. Nothing could have been more regal than her eyes shooting lightnings through her tears. Her look blasted the conflagration.

The marquis listened. Her voice flung its echoes down upon his head: inarticulate, heart-rending—sobs rather than words.

"Ah, my God, my children! Those are my children! Help! Fire! fire! fire! Oh, you brigands! Is there no one here? My children are burning up! Georgette! My babies! Gros-Alain—René-Jean! What does it mean? Who put my children there? They are asleep. Oh, I am mad! It is impossible! Help, help!"

Still a great bustle and movement was apparent in La Tourgue and upon the plateau. The whole camp rushed out to the fire which had just burst forth. The besiegers, after meeting the grape-shot, had now to deal with the conflagration. Gauvain, Cimourdain, and Guéchamp were giving orders. What was to be done? Only a few buckets of water could be drained from the half-dried brook of the ravine. The consternation increased. The whole edge of the plateau was covered with men whose troubled faces watched the progress of the flames.

What they saw was terrible. They gazed, and could do nothing.

The flames had spread along the ivy and reached the topmost story, leaping greedily upon the straw with which it was filled. The entire granary was burning now. The flames wreathed and danced as if in fiendish joy. A cruel breeze fanned the pyre. One could fancy



FOUND, YET LOST.

the evil spirit of Imânus urging on the fire, and rejoicing in the destruction which had been his last earthly crime.

The library, though between the two burning stories, was not yet on fire; the height of its ceiling and the thickness of the walls retarded the fatal moment—but it was fast approaching; the flames from below licked the stones—the flames from above whirled down to caress them with the awful embrace of death: beneath, a cave of lava—above, an arch of embers. If the floor fell first, the children would be flung into the lava stream; if the ceiling gave way, they would be buried beneath burning coals.

The little ones slept still; across the sheets of flame and smoke which now hid, now exposed the casements, they were visible in that fiery grotto, within that meteoric glare, peaceful, lovely, motionless, like three confident cherubs slumbering in a hell; a tiger might have wept to see those angels in that furnace, those cradles in that tomb.

And the mother was wringing her hands.

"Fire! I say, fire! Are they all deaf, that nobody comes? They are burning my children! Come—come—you men that I see yonder. Oh, the days and days that I have hunted—and this is where I find them! Fire! Help! Three angels—to think of three angels burning there! What had they done, the innocents? They shot me—they are burning my little ones. Who is it does such things? Help! Save my children! Do you not hear me? A dog—one would have pity on a dog! My children—my children! They are asleep. Oh, Georgette—I see her face! René-Jean! Gros-Alain! Those are their names. You may know I am their mother. Oh, it is horrible! I have traveled days and nights! Why, this very morning I talked of them with a woman! Help, help! Where are those monsters? Horror, horror! The eldest not five years old—the youngest not two. I can see their little bare legs. They are asleep, Holy Virgin! Heaven gave them to me, and devils snatch them away. To think how far I have journeyed! My children, that I nourished with my milk! I, who thought myself wretched because I could not find them! Have pity on me. I want my children—I must have my children! And there they are in the fire! See, how my poor feet bleed! Help! It is not possible, if there are men on the earth, that my little ones will be left to die like this. Help! Murder! Oh, such a thing was never seen! Oh, assassins! What is that dreadful house there? They stole my children from me in order to kill them. God of mercy, give me my children! They shall not die! Help—help—help! Oh, I shall curse heaven itself, if they die like that!"

While the mother's awful supplications rang out, other voices rose upon the plateau and in the ravine.

"A ladder!"

"There is no ladder!"

"Water!"

"There is no water!"

"Up yonder—in the tower—on the second story, there is a door."

"It is iron."

"Break it in!"

"Impossible!"

And the mother, redoubling her agonized appeals:

"Fire! Help! Hurry, I say—if you will not kill me! My children, my children! Oh, the horrible fire! Take them out of it, or throw me in!"

In the interval between these clamors the triumphant crackling of the flames could be heard.

The marquis put his hand in his pocket and touched the key of the iron door. Then, stooping again beneath the vault through which he had escaped, he turned back into the passage from whence he had just emerged.

CHAPTER · II

FROM THE DOOR OF STONE TO THE IRON DOOR



WHOLE army distracted by the impossibility of giving aid ; four thousand men unable to succor three children ; such was the situation.

Not even a ladder to be had ; that sent from Javené had not arrived. The flaming space widened like a crater that opens. To attempt the staying of the fire by means of the half-dried brook would have been mad folly—like flinging a glass of water on a volcano.

Cimourdain, Guéchamp, and Radoub had descended into the ravine ; Gauvain remounted to the room in the second story of the tower, where were the stone that turned, the secret passage, and the iron door leading into the library. It was there that the sulphur-match had been lighted by Imânus ; from thence the conflagration had started.

Gauvain took with him twenty sappers. There was no possible resource except to break open the iron door—its fastenings were terribly secure.

They began by blows with axes. The axes broke. A sapper said :
“ Steel snaps like glass against that iron.”

The door was made of double sheets of wrought iron, bolted together ; each sheet three fingers in thickness.

They took iron bars and tried to shake the door beneath their blows ; the bars broke “ like matches ! ” said one of the sappers.

Gauvain murmured gloomily :

“ Nothing but a ball could open that door. If we could only get a cannon up here.”

“ But how to do it ! ” answered the sapper.

There was a moment of overwhelmment. Those powerless arms ceased their efforts. Mute, conquered, dismayed, these men stood star-

ing at the immovable door. A red reflection crept from beneath it. Behind, the conflagration was each instant increasing.

The frightful corpse of Imânus lay on the floor—a demoniac victor. Only a few moments more and the whole bridge-castle might fall in. What could be done? There was not a hope left.

Gauvain, with his eyes fixed on the turning-stone and the secret passage, cried furiously :



“It was by that the Marquis de Lantenac escaped.”

“And returns,” said a voice.

The face of a white-haired man appeared in the stone frame of the secret opening.

It was the marquis!

Many years had passed since Gauvain had seen that face so near. He recoiled.

The rest all stood petrified with astonishment.

The marquis held a large key in his hand; he cast a haughty glance

upon the sappers standing before him, walked straight to the iron door, bent beneath the arch, and put the key in the lock. The iron creaked, the door opened, revealing a gulf of flame—the marquis entered it. He entered with a firm step—his head erect. The lookers-on followed him with their eyes.

The marquis had scarcely moved half a dozen paces down the blazing hall when the floor, undermined by the fire, gave way beneath his feet and opened a precipice between him and the door. He did not even turn his head—he walked steadily on. He disappeared in the smoke. Nothing more could be seen.

Had he been able to advance farther? Had a new gulf of fire opened beneath his feet? Had he only succeeded in destroying himself? They could not tell. They had before them only a wall of smoke and flame. The marquis was beyond that, living or dead.

CHAPTER III

WHERE WE SEE THE CHILDREN WAKE THAT WE SAW GO ASLEEP

THE little ones opened their eyes at last.

The conflagration had not yet entered the library, but it cast a rosy glow across the ceiling. The children had never seen an aurora like that; they watched it. Georgette was in ecstasies.

The conflagration unfurled all its splendors; the black hydra and the scarlet dragon appeared amidst the wreathing smoke in awful darkness and gorgeous vermillion. Long streaks of flame shot far out and illuminated the shadows, like opposing comets pursuing one another. Fire is recklessly prodigal with its treasures; its furnaces are filled with gems which it flings to the winds; it is not for nothing that charcoal is identical with the diamond.

Fissures had opened in the wall of the upper story, through which the embers poured like cascades of jewels; the heaps of straw and oats burning in the granary began to stream out of the windows in an avalanche of golden rain, the oats turning to amethysts and the straw to carbuncles.

"Pretty!" said Georgette.

They all three raised themselves.

"Ah!" cried the mother. "They have awakened!"

René-Jean got up, then Gros-Alain, and Georgette followed.

René-Jean stretched his arms toward the window and said, "I am warm."

"Me warm," cooed Georgette.

The mother shrieked:

"My children! René! Alain! Georgette!"

The little ones looked about. They strove to comprehend. When men are frightened children are only curious. He who is easily aston-

ished is difficult to alarm; ignorance is intrepidity. Children have so little claim to purgatory that if they saw it they would admire.

The mother repeated:

"René! Alain! Georgette!"

René-Jean turned his head; that voice roused him from his reverie. Children have short memories, but their recollections are swift; the whole past is yesterday to them. René-Jean saw his mother, found that perfectly natural, and feeling a vague want of support in the midst of those strange surroundings, he called:

"Mamma!"

"Mamma!" said Gros-Alain.

"M'ma!" said Georgette.

And she held out her little arms.

"My children!" shrieked the mother.

All three went close to the window-ledge: fortunately the fire was not on that side.

"I am too warm," said René-Jean.

He added, "It burns."

Then his eyes sought the mother.

"Come here, mamma!" he cried.

"Tum, m'ma," repeated Georgette.

The mother, with her hair streaming about her face, her garments torn, her feet and hands bleeding, let herself roll from bush to bush down into the ravine. Cimourdain and Guéchamp were there, as powerless as Gauvain was above. The soldiers, desperate at being able to do nothing, swarmed about. The heat was insupportable, but nobody felt it. They looked at the bridge—the height of the arches—the different stories of the castle—the inaccessible windows. Help to be of any avail must come at once. Three stories to climb. No way of doing it.

Radoub, wounded, with a sabre-cut on his shoulder and one ear torn off, rushed forward dripping with sweat and blood. He saw Michelle Fléchar.

"Hold!" cried he. "The woman that was shot! So you have come to life again?"

"My children!" groaned the mother.

"You are right," answered Radoub; "we have no time to occupy ourselves about ghosts."

He attempted to climb the bridge, but in vain; he dug his nails in between the stones and clung there for a few seconds, but the layers were as smoothly joined as if the wall had been new—Radoub fell back. The conflagration swept on, each instant growing more terrible. They could see the heads of the three children framed in the red light of the

window. In his frenzy Radoub shook his clenched hand at the sky, and shouted, "Is there no mercy yonder!"

The mother, on her knees, clung to one of the piers, crying, "Mercy, mercy!"

The hollow sound of cracking timbers rose above the roar of the flames. The panes of glass in the book-cases of the library cracked and fell with a crash. It was evident that the timber-work had given way. Human strength could do nothing. Another moment and the whole would fall. The soldiers only waited for the final catastrophe. They could hear the little voices repeat, "Mamma! mamma!"

The whole crowd was paralyzed with horror. Suddenly, at the casement near that where the children stood, a tall form appeared against the crimson background of the flames.

Every head was raised—every eye fixed. A man was above there—a man in the library—in the furnace. The face showed black against the flames, but they could see the white hair—they recognized the Marquis de Lantenac.

He disappeared, then appeared again.

The indomitable old man stood in the window shoving out an enormous ladder. It was the escape-ladder deposited in the library—he had seen it lying upon the floor and dragged it to the window. He held it by one end—with the marvelous agility of an athlete he slipped it out of the casement, and slid it along the wall down into the ravine.

Radoub folded his arms about the ladder as it descended within his reach, crying, "Long live the Republic!"

The marquis shouted, "Long live the King!"

Radoub muttered, "You may cry what you like, and talk nonsense if you please, you are an angel of mercy all the same."

The ladder was settled in place, and communication established between the burning floor and the ground. Twenty men rushed up, Radoub at their head, and in the twinkling of an eye they were hanging to the rungs from the top to the bottom, making a human ladder. He had his face turned toward the conflagration. The little army scattered among the heath and along the sides of the ravine pressed forward, overcome by contending emotions, upon the plateau, into the ravine, out on the platform of the tower.

The marquis disappeared again, then re-appeared bearing a child in his arms. There was a tremendous clapping of hands.

The marquis had seized the first little one that he found within reach. It was Gros-Alain.

Gros-Alain cried, "I am afraid."

The marquis gave the boy to Radoub; Radoub passed him on to



"THEY ARE ALL SAVED!"

the soldier behind, who passed him to another, and just as Gros-Alain, greatly frightened and sobbing loudly, was given from hand to hand to the bottom of the ladder, the marquis, who had been absent for a moment, returned to the window with René-Jean, who struggled and wept and beat Radoub with his little fists as the marquis passed him on to the sergeant.

The marquis went back into the chamber that was now filled with flames. Georgette was there alone. He went up to her. She smiled. This man of granite felt his eyelids grow moist. He asked, "What is your name?"

"Orgette," said she.

He took her in his arms; she was still smiling, and, at the instant he handed her to Radoub, that conscience so lofty, and yet so darkened, was dazzled by the beauty of innocence; the old man kissed the child.

"It is the little girl!" said the soldiers; and Georgette in her turn descended from arm to arm till she reached the ground, amidst cries of exultation. They clapped their hands; they leaped; the old grenadiers sobbed, and she smiled at them.

The mother stood at the foot of the ladder breathless, mad, intoxicated by this change—flung, without transition, from hell into paradise. Excess of joy lacerates the heart in its own way. She extended her arms; she received first Gros-Alain, then René-Jean, then Georgette. She covered them with frantic kisses, then burst into a wild laugh and fainted.

A great cry rose: "They are all saved!"

All were indeed saved, except the old man.

But no one thought of him—not even he himself, perhaps.

He remained for a few instants leaning against the window-ledge lost in a reverie, as if he wished to leave the gulf of flames time to make a decision. Then, without the least haste, slowly indeed and proudly, he stepped over the window-sill, and erect, upright, his shoulders against the rungs, having the conflagration at his back, the depth before him, he began to descend the ladder in silence with the majesty of a phantom. The men who were on the ladder sprang off; every witness shuddered; about this man thus descending from that height there was a sacred horror as about a vision. But he plunged calmly into the darkness before him; they recoiled, he drew nearer them; the marble pallor of his face showed no emotion; his haughty eyes were calm and cold; at each step he made toward those men whose wondering eyes gazed upon him out of the darkness, he seemed to tower higher, the ladder shook and echoed under his firm tread—one might have thought him the statue of the *Commendatore* descending anew into his sepulchre.

As the marquis reached the bottom, and his foot left the last rung and planted itself on the ground, a hand seized his shoulder. He turned about.

“I arrest you,” said Cimourdain.

“I approve of what you do,” said Lantenac.



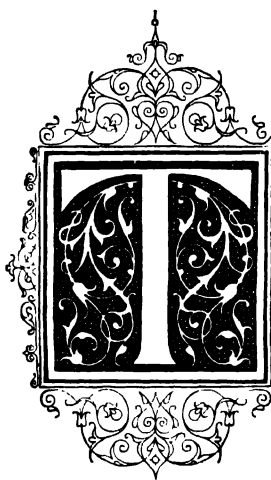
AFTER THE VICTORY THE COMBAT BEGINS.

BOOK VI

AFTER THE VICTORY THE COMBAT BEGINS

CHAPTER I

LANTENAC TAKEN



THE marquis had indeed descended into the tomb. He was led away.

The crypt dungeon of the ground-floor of La Tourgue was immediately opened under Cimourdain's lynx-eyed superintendence. A lamp was placed within, a jug of water and a loaf of soldier's bread; a bundle of straw was flung on the ground, and in less than a quarter of an hour from the instant when the priest's hand seized Lantenac the door of the dungeon closed upon him.

This done, Cimourdain went to find Gauvain; at that instant eleven o'clock sounded from the distant church-clock of Parigné. Cimourdain said to his former pupil:

"I am going to convoke a court-martial; you will not be there. You are a Gauvain, and Lantenac is a Gauvain. You are too near a kinsman to be his judge; I blame Égalité for having voted upon Capet's sentence. The court-martial will be composed of three judges; an officer, Captain Guéchamp; a non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Radoub, and myself—I shall preside. Nothing of all this concerns you any longer. We will conform to the decree of the Convention; we will

confine ourselves to proving the identity of the *ci-devant* Marquis de Lantenac. To-morrow the court-martial—day after to-morrow the guillotine. The Vendée is dead.”

Gauvain did not answer a word, and Cimourdain, preoccupied by the final task which remained for him to fulfill, left the young man alone. Cimourdain had to decide upon the hour and choose the place. He had, like Lequinio at Granville, like Tallien at Bordeaux, like Châlier at Lyons, like Saint-Just at Strasbourg, the habit of assisting personally at executions; it was considered a good example for the judge to come and see the headsman do his work—a custom borrowed by the Terror of '93 from the parliaments of France and the Inquisition of Spain.

Gauvain also was preoccupied.

A cold wind moaned up from the forest; Gauvain left Guéchamp to give the necessary orders, went to his tent in the meadow which stretched along the edge of the wood at the foot of La Tourgue, took his hooded cloak and enveloped himself therein. This cloak was bordered with the simple galoon which, according to the Republican custom, chary of ornament, designated the commander-in-chief. He began to walk about in this bloody field where the attack had commenced. He was alone there. The fire still continued, but no one any longer paid attention to it. Radoub was beside the children and their mother, almost as maternal as she. The bridge-castle was nearly consumed—the sappers hastened the destruction. The soldiers were digging trenches in order to bury the dead; the wounded were being cared for; the retirade had been demolished; the chambers and stairs disencumbered of the dead; the soldiers were cleansing the scene of carnage, sweeping away the terrible rubbish of the victory; with true military rapidity setting every thing in order after the battle. Gauvain saw nothing of all this.

So profound was his reverie that he scarcely cast a glance toward the guard about the tower, doubled by the orders of Cimourdain.

He could distinguish the breach through the obscurity, perhaps two hundred feet away from the corner of the field where he had taken refuge. He could see the black opening. It was there the attack had commenced three hours before; it was by this dark gap that he—Gauvain—had penetrated into the tower; there was the ground-floor where the retirade had stood; it was on that same floor that the door of the marquis's prison opened. The guard at the breach watched this dungeon.

While his eyes were absently fixed upon the heath, in his ear rang confusedly, like the echo of a knell, these words: “To-morrow the court-martial; day after to-morrow, the guillotine.”

The conflagration, which had been isolated, and upon which the sappers had thrown all the water that could be procured, did not die away without resistance; it still cast out intermittent flames. At moments the cracking of the ceilings could be heard, and the crash one upon another of the different stories as they fell in a common ruin;



then a whirlwind of sparks would fly through the air, as if a gigantic torch had been shaken; a glare like lightning illuminated the farthest verge of the horizon, and the shadow of *La Tourgue*, growing suddenly colossal, spread out to the edge of the forest.

Gauvain walked slowly to and fro amidst the gloom in front of the breach. At intervals he clasped his two hands at the back of his head, covered with his soldier's hood. He was thinking.

CHAPTER II

GAUVAIN'S SELF-QUESTIONING

HIS reverie was fathomless. A seemingly impossible change had taken place.

The Marquis de Lantenac had been transfigured. Gauvain had been a witness of this transfiguration.

He would never have believed that such a state of affairs would arrive from any complication of events, whatever they might be. Never would he have imagined, even in a dream, that any thing similar would be possible.

The unexpected—that inexplicable power which plays with man at will—had seized Gauvain, and held him fast.

He had before him the impossible become a reality, visible, palpable, inevitable, inexorable.

What did he think of it—he, Gauvain?

There was no chance of evasion; the decision must be made.

A question was put to him; he could not avoid it. Put by whom? By events.

And not alone by events.

For when events, which are mutable, address a question to our souls, Justice, which is unchangeable, summons us to reply.

Above the cloud which casts its shadow upon us is the star that sends toward us its light.

We can no more escape from the light than from the shadow.

Gauvain was undergoing an interrogatory. He had been arraigned before a judge.

Before a terrible judge. His conscience.

Gauvain felt every power of his soul vacillate. His resolutions the most solid, his promises the most piously uttered, his decisions the most irrevocable, all tottered in this terrible overwhelmment of his will. There

are moral earthquakes. The more he reflected upon that which he had lately seen, the more confused he became.

Gauvain, Republican, believed himself, and was, just. A higher justice had revealed itself. Above the justice of revolutions is that of humanity.

What had happened could not be eluded; the case was grave; Gauvain made part of it; he could not withdraw himself, and, although Cimourdain had said, "It concerns you no further," he felt within his soul the pang which a tree may feel when torn upward from its roots.

Every man has a basis; a disturbance of this base causes a profound trouble—it was what Gauvain now felt. He pressed his head between his two hands, searching for the truth. To state clearly a situation like his is not easy; nothing could be more painful; he had before him the formidable ciphers which he must sum up into a total; to judge a human destiny by mathematical rules: his head whirled. He tried; he endeavored to consider the matter; he forced himself to collect his ideas, to discipline the resistance which he felt within himself, and to recapitulate the facts.

He set them all before his mind.

To whom has it not arrived to make such a report, and to interrogate himself in some supreme circumstances upon the route which must be followed, whether to advance or retreat?

Gauvain had just been witness of a miracle. Before the earthly combat had fairly ended, there came a celestial struggle. The conflict of good against evil.

A heart of adamant had been conquered.

Given the man, with all that he had of evil within him, violence, error, blindness, unwholesome obstinacy, pride, egotism—Gauvain had just witnessed a miracle.

The victory of humanity over the man.

Humanity had conquered the inhuman.

And by what means? In what manner? How had it been able to overthrow that colossus of wrath and hatred? What arms had it employed? What implement of war? The cradle!

Gauvain had been dazzled. In the midst of social war, in the very blaze of all hatreds and all vengeancees, at the darkest and most furious moment of the tumult, at the hour when crime gave all its fires, and hate all its blackness—at that instant of conflict, when every sentiment becomes a projectile, when the *mêlée* is so fierce that one no longer knows what is justice, honesty, or truth, suddenly the Unknown—mysterious warner of *souls*—sent the grand rays of eternal truth resplendent across human light and darkness.

Above that sombre duel between the false and the relatively true, there, in the depths, the face of truth itself abruptly appeared.

Suddenly the force of the feeble had interposed.

He had seen three poor creatures, almost new born, unreasoning, abandoned, orphans, alone, lisping, smiling, having against them civil war, retaliation, the horrible logic of reprisals, murder, carnage, fratricide, rage, hatred, all the Gorgons—triumph against those powers. He had seen the defeat and extinction of a horrible conflagration charged to commit a crime; he had seen atrocious premeditations disconcerted and brought to naught; he had seen ancient feudal ferocity, inexorable disdain, professed experiences of the necessities of war, reasons of State, all the arrogant resolves of a savage old age, vanish before the clear gaze of those who had not yet lived; and this was natural, for he who has not yet lived has done no evil: he is justice, truth, purity, and the highest angels of Heaven hover about those souls of little children.

A useful spectacle, a counsel, a lesson. The maddened, merciless combatants, in face of all the projects, all the outrages of war, fanaticism, assassination, revenge kindling the fagots, death coming torch in hand, had suddenly seen all-powerful Innocence raise itself above this enormous legion of crimes.

And Innocence had conquered.

One could say: No, civil war does not exist; barbarism does not exist; hatred does not exist; crime does not exist; darkness does not exist. To scatter these spectres it only needed that divine aurora—Innocence.

Never in any conflict had Satan and God been more plainly visible. This conflict had a human conscience for its arena.

The conscience of Lantenac.

Now the battle began again, more desperate, more decisive still perhaps, in another conscience.

The conscience of Gauvain.

What a battle-ground is the soul of man! We are given up to those gods, those monsters, those giants—our thoughts. Often these terrible belligerents trample our very souls down in their mad conflict.

Gauvain meditated.

The Marquis de Lantenac, surrounded, doomed, condemned, outlawed, shut in like the wild beast in the circus, held like a nail in the pincers, inclosed in his refuge become his prison, bound on every side by a wall of iron and fire, had succeeded in stealing away. He had performed a miracle in escaping. He had accomplished that master-piece—the most difficult of all in such a war—flight. He had again taken possession of the forest, to intrench himself therein—of the district, to

fight there—of the shadow, to disappear within it. He had once more become the formidable, the dangerous wanderer—the captain of the invincibles—the chief of the under-ground forces—the master of the woods. Gauvain had the victory, but Lantenac had his liberty. Henceforth Lantenac had security before him, limitless freedom, an inexhaustible choice of asylums. He was indiscernible, unapproachable, inaccessible. The lion had been taken in the snare, and had broken through.

Well, he had re-entered it.

The Marquis de Lantenac had voluntarily, spontaneously, by his own free act, left the forest, the shadow, security, liberty, to return to that horrible peril; intrepid when Gauvain saw him the first time plunge into the conflagration at the risk of being engulfed therein; intrepid a second time, when he descended that ladder which delivered him to his enemies—a ladder of escape to others, of perdition to him.

And why had he thus acted?

• To save three children.

And now what was it they were about to do to this man?

Guillotine him.

Had these three children been his own? No. Of his family? No. Of his rank? No. For three little beggars—chance children, foundlings, unknown, ragged, barefooted—this noble, this prince, this old man, free, safe, triumphant—for evasion is a triumph—had risked all, compromised all, lost all; and at the same time he restored the babes, had proudly brought his own head, and this head, hitherto terrible, but now august, he offered to his foes.

And what were they about to do?

Accept the sacrifice.

The Marquis de Lantenac had had the choice between the life of others and his own: in this superb option he had chosen death. And it was to be granted him. He was to be killed.

What a reward for heroism! Respond to a generous act by a barbarous one! What a degrading of the Revolution! What a belittling of the Republic!

As this man of prejudice and servitude, suddenly transformed, returned into the circle of humanity, the men who strove for deliverance and freedom elected to cling to the horrors of civil war, to the routine of blood, to fratricide!

The divine law of forgiveness, abnegation, redemption, sacrifice, existed for the combatants of error, and did not exist for the soldiers of truth!

What! Not to make a struggle in magnanimity? Resign themselves to this defeat? They, the stronger, to show themselves the

weaker? They, victorious, to become assassins, and cause it to be said that there were those on the side of monarchy who saved children, and those on the side of the Republic who slew old men!

The world would see this great soldier, this powerful octogenarian, this disarmed warrior, stolen rather than captured, seized in the performance of a good action, seized by his own permission with the sweat of a noble devotion still upon his brow, mount the steps of the scaffold as he would mount to the grandeur of an apotheosis! And they would put beneath the knife that head about which would circle, as suppliants, the souls of the three little angels he had saved! And before this punishment—infamous for the butchers—a smile would be seen on the face of that man, and the blush of shame on the face of the Republic!

And this would be accomplished in the presence of Gauvain, the chief.

And he who might hinder this would abstain. He would rest content under that haughty absolution: "*This concerns thee no longer.*" And he was not even to say to himself that in such a case abdication of authority was complicity! He was not to perceive that of two men engaged in an action so hideous, he who permits the thing is worse than the man who does the work, because he is the coward!

But this death—had he not promised it? Had not he, Gauvain, the merciful, declared that Lantenac should have no mercy, that he would himself deliver Lantenac to Cîmourdain?

That head—he owed it. Well, he would pay the debt. So be it.

But was it, indeed, the same head?

Hitherto Gauvain had seen in Lantenac only the barbarous warrior, the fanatic of royalty and feudalism, the slaughterer of prisoners, an assassin whom war had let loose, a man of blood. That man he had not feared; he had proscribed that proscriber; the implacable would have found him inexorable. Nothing more simple; the road was marked out and terribly plain to follow; every thing foreseen; those who killed must be killed; the path of horror was clear and straight. Unexpectedly that straight line had been broken; a sudden turn in the way revealed a new horizon; a metamorphosis had taken place. An unknown Lantenac entered upon the scene. A hero sprang up from the monster; more than a hero—a man. More than a soul—a heart. It was no longer a murderer that Gauvain had before him, but a savior. Gauvain was flung to the earth by a flood of celestial radiance. Lantenac had struck him with the thunder-bolt of generosity.

And Lantenac transfigured could not transfigure Gauvain!

What! Was this stroke of light to produce no counter-stroke? Was the man of the Past to push on in front, and the man of the

Future to fall back? Was the man of barbarism and superstition suddenly to unfold angel pinions, and soar aloft to watch the man of the ideal crawl beneath him in the mire and the night? Gauvain to lie wallowing in the blood-stained rut of the Past, while Lantenac rose to a new existence in the sublime Future?

Another thing still. Their family!

This blood which he was about to spill—for to let it be spilled was to spill it himself—was not this his blood, his Gauvain's? His grandfather was dead, but his grand-uncle lived, and this grand-uncle was the Marquis de Lantenac. Would not that ancestor who had gone to the grave rise to prevent his brother from being forced into it? Would he not command his grandson henceforth to respect that crown of white hairs, become pure as his own angelic halo? Did not a spectre loom with indignant eyes between him, Gauvain, and Lantenac?

Was, then, the aim of the Revolution to denaturalize man? Had she been born to break the ties of family and to stifle the instincts of humanity? Far from it. It was to affirm these glorious realities, not to deny them, that '89 had risen. To overturn the bastilles was to deliver humanity; to abolish feudality was to found families. The author being the point from whence authority sets out, and authority being included in the author, there can be no other authority than paternity; hence the legitimacy of the queen-bee who creates her people, and who, being mother, is queen; hence the absurdity of the king-man, who, not being father, can not be master. Hence the suppression of the king; hence the Republic that comes from all this? Family, humanity, revolution. Revolution is the accession of the peoples, and, at the bottom, the People is Man.

The thing to decide was, whether when Lantenac returned into humanity, Gauvain should return to his family.

The thing to decide was, whether the uncle and nephew should meet again in a higher light, or whether the nephew's recoil should reply to the uncle's progress.

The question in this pathetic debate between Gauvain and his conscience had resolved itself into this, and the answer seemed to come of itself—he must save Lantenac.

Yes; but France?

Here the dizzying problem suddenly changed its face.

What! France at bay? France betrayed, flung open, dismantled? Having no longer a moat, Germany would cross the Rhine; no longer a wall, Italy would leap the Alps, and Spain the Pyrenees. There would remain to France that great abyss, the ocean. She had for her the gulf. She could back herself against it, and, giantess, supported by the entire

sea, could combat the whole earth. A position, after all, impregnable. Yet no; this position would fail her. The ocean no longer belonged to her. In this ocean was England. True, England was at a loss how to traverse it. Well, a man would fling her a bridge; a man would extend his hand to her; a man would go to Pitt, to Craig, to Cornwallis, to Dundas, to the pirates, and say, "Come!" A man would cry, "England, seize France!" And this man was the Marquis de Lantenac.

This man was now held fast. After three months of chase, of pursuit, of frenzy, he had at last been taken. The hand of the Revolution had just closed upon the accursed one; the clenched fist of '93 had seized this Royalist murderer by the throat. Through that mysterious premeditation from on high which mixes itself in human affairs, it was in the dungeon belonging to his family that this parricide awaited his punishment. The feudal lord was in the feudal oubliette. The stones of his own castle rose against him and shut him in, and he who had sought to betray his country had been betrayed by his own dwelling. God had visibly arranged all this; the hour had sounded; the Revolution had taken prisoner this public enemy; he could no longer fight, he could no longer struggle, he could no longer harm; in this Vendée, which owned so many arms, his was the sole brain; with his extinction, civil war would be extinct. He was held fast; tragic and fortunate conclusion. After so many massacres, so much carnage, he was a captive, this man who had slain so pitilessly, and it was his turn to die.

And if some one should be found to save him!

Cimourdain, that is to say, '93, held Lantenac, that is to say, Monarchy, and could any one be found to snatch its prey from that hand of bronze? Lantenac, the man in whom concentrated that sheaf of scourges called the Past—the Marquis de Lantenac was in the tomb—the heavy eternal door had closed upon him—would some one come from without to draw back the bolt? This social malefactor was dead, and with him died revolt, fratricidal contest, bestial war; and would any one be found to resuscitate him?

Oh, how that death's-head would laugh!

That spectre would say, "It is well; I live again—the idiots!"

How he would once more set himself at his hideous work; how joyously and implacably this Lantenac would plunge anew into the gulf of war and hatred, and on the morrow would be seen again houses burning, prisoners massacred, the wounded slain, women shot.

And, after all, did not Gauvain exaggerate this action which had fascinated him?

Three children were lost; Lantenac saved them. But who had flung them into that peril? Was it not Lantenac?

Who had set those three cradles in the heart of the conflagration? Was it not Imânus? Who was Imânus? The lieutenant of the marquis.

The one responsible is the chief. Hence the incendiary and the assassin was Lantenac. What had he done so admirable? He had not persisted—that was all.

After having conceived the crime, he had recoiled before it. He had become horrified at himself. That mother's cry had awakened in him those remains of human mercy which exist in all souls, even the most hardened. At this cry he had returned upon his steps. Out of the night where he had buried himself, he hastened toward the day. After having brought about the crime, he caused its defeat. His whole merit consisted in this—not to have been a monster to the end.

And in return for so little, to restore him all! To give him freedom, the fields, the plains, air, day, restore to him the forest, which he would employ to shelter his bandits; restore him liberty, which he would use to bring about slavery; restore life, which he would devote to death.

As for trying to come to an understanding with him, attempting to treat with that arrogant soul, propose his deliverance under certain conditions, demand if he would consent, were his life spared, henceforth to abstain from all hostilities and all revolt—what an error such an offer would be—what an advantage it would give him—against what scorn would the proposer wound himself—how he would freeze the questioner by his response, “Keep such shame for yourself—kill me!”

There was, in short, nothing to do with this man but to slay or set him free. He was ever ready to soar or to sacrifice himself; his strange soul held at once the eagle and the abyss.

To slay him? What a pang! To set him free? What a responsibility!

Lantenac saved, all was to begin anew with the Vendée, like a struggle with a hydra whose heads had not been severed. In the twinkling of an eye, with the rapidity of a meteor, the flame extinguished by this man's disappearance would blaze up again. Lantenac would never stop to rest until he had carried out that execrable plan—to fling, like the cover of a tomb, Monarchy upon the Republic, and England upon France. To save Lantenac was to sacrifice France. Life to Lantenac was death to a host of innocent beings—men, women, children, caught anew in that domestic war; it was the landing of the English, the recoil of the Revolution; it was the sacking of the villages, the rending of the people, the mangling of Brittany; it was flinging the prey back into the tiger's claw. And Gauvain, in the midst of uncer-

tain gleams and rays of introverted light, beheld, vaguely sketched across his reverie, this problem rise : the setting the tiger at liberty.

And then the question re-appeared under its first aspect ; the stone of Sisyphus, which is nothing other than the combat of man with himself, fell back. Was Lantenac that tiger ?

Perhaps he had been ; but was he still ? Gauvain was dizzy beneath the whirl and conflict in his soul ; his thoughts turned and circled upon themselves with serpentine swiftness. After the closest examination could any one deny Lantenac's devotion, his stoical self-abnegation, his superb disinterestedness ? What ! To attest his humanity in the presence of the open jaws of civil war ! What ! In this contest of inferior truths, to bring the highest truth of all ! What ! To prove that above royalties, above revolutions, above earthly questions, is the grand tenderness of the human soul, the recognition of the protection due to the feeble from the strong, the safety due to those who are perishing from those who are saved, the paternity due to all little children from all old men ! To prove these magnificent truths by the gift of his head ! To be a general, and renounce strategy, battle, revenge ! What ! To be a Royalist, and to take a balance and put in one scale the King of France, a monarchy of fifteen centuries, old laws to re-establish, ancient society to restore, and in the other, three little unknown peasants, and to find the king, the throne, the sceptre, and fifteen centuries of monarchy too light to weigh against these three innocent creatures. What ! was all that nothing ? What ! Could he who had done this remain a tiger ? Ought he to be treated like a wild beast ? No, no, no ! The man who had just illuminated the abyss of civil war by the light of a divine action was not a monster. The sword-bearer was metamorphosed into the angel of day. The infernal Satan had again become the celestial Lucifer. Lantenac had atoned for all his barbarities by one act of sacrifice ; in losing himself materially he had saved himself morally ; he had become innocent again, he had signed his own pardon. Does not the right of self-forgiveness exist ? Henceforth he was venerable.

Lantenac had just shown himself almost superhuman. It was now Gauvain's turn. Gauvain was called upon to answer him.

The struggle of good and evil passions made the world a chaos at this epoch ; Lantenac, dominating the chaos, had just brought humanity out of it ; it now remained for Gauvain to bring forth their family therefrom.

What was he about to do ? Was Gauvain about to betray the trust Providence had shown in him ?

No. And he murmured within himself, " Let us save Lantenac."

And a voice answered, "It is well. Go on; aid the English. Desert. Pass over to the enemy. Save Lantenac and betray France."

And Gauvain shuddered. "Thy solution is no solution, oh dreamer!" Gauvain saw the Sphinx smile bitterly in the shadow.

This situation was a sort of formidable meeting-ground where hostile truths confronted one another, and where the three highest ideas of man—humanity, family, country—looked in each other's faces.

Each of these voices took up the word in its turn, and each uttered truth. Each in its turn seemed to find the point where wisdom and justice met, and said, "Do this!" Was that the thing he ought to do? Yes. No. Reasoning said one thing, and feeling another; the two counsels were in direct opposition. Reasoning is only reason; feeling is often conscience; the one comes from man himself, the other from a higher source. Hence it is that feeling has less clearness and more power.

Still, what force stern reason possesses!

Gauvain hesitated.

Maddening perplexity. Two abysses opened before him. Should he let the marquis perish? Should he save him? He must plunge into one depth or the other.

Toward which of the two gulfs did Duty point?

CHAPTER III

THE COMMANDANT'S MANTLE

IT was, after all, with Duty that these victors had to deal. Duty raised herself—stern to Cimourdain's eyes—terrible to those of Gauvain. Simple before the one; complex, diverse, tortuous, before the other.

Midnight sounded; then one o'clock.

Without being conscious of it, Gauvain had gradually approached the entrance to the breach. The expiring conflagration only flung out intermittent gleams. The plateau on the other side of the tower caught the reflection and became visible for an instant, then disappeared from view as the smoke swept over the flames. This glare, reviving in jets and cut by sudden shadows, disproportioned objects, and made the sentinels look like phantoms. Lost in his reverie, Gauvain mechanically watched the strife between the flame and smoke. These appearances and disappearances of the light before his eyes had a strange, subtle analogy with the revealing and concealment of truth in his soul.

Suddenly, between two clouds of smoke, a long streak of flame, shot out from the dying brasier, illuminated vividly the summit of the plateau, and brought out the skeleton of a wagon against the vermillion background.

Gauvain stared at this wagon; it was surrounded by horsemen wearing gendarmes' hats. It seemed to him the wagon which he had looked at through Guéchamp's glass several hours before, when the sun was setting and the wagon away off on the verge of the horizon. Some men were mounted on the cart and appeared to be unloading it. That which they took off seemed to be heavy, and now and then gave out the sound of clanking iron. It would have been difficult to tell what it was; it looked like beams for a frame-work. Two of the men lifted between

them and set upon the ground a box, which, as well as he could judge by the shape, contained a triangular object.

The flame sank; all was again buried in darkness. Gauvain stood with fixed eyes lost in thought upon that which the darkness hid.

Lanterns were lighted, men came and went on the plateau; but the forms of those moving about were confused, and, moreover, Gauvain was below and on the other side of the ravine, and therefore could see little of what was passing. Voices spoke, but he could not catch the words. Now and then came a sound like the shock of timbers striking together. He could hear also a strange metallic creaking, like the sharpening of a scythe.

Two o'clock struck.

Slowly, and like one who strove to retreat and yet was forced by some invisible power to advance, Gauvain approached the breach. As he came near, the sentinel recognized in the shadow the cloak and braided hood of the commandant, and presented arms. Gauvain entered the hall of the ground-floor, which had been transformed into a guard-room. A lantern hung from the roof. It cast just light enough so that one could cross the hall without treading upon the soldiers who lay, most of them asleep, upon the straw.

There they lay; they had been fighting a few hours before; the grape-shot, partially swept away, scattered its grains of iron and lead over the floor and troubled their repose somewhat, but they were weary, and so slept. This hall had been the battle-ground—the scene of frenzied attack; there men had groaned, howled, ground their teeth, struck out blindly in their death-agony, and expired. Many of these sleepers' companions had fallen dead upon this floor, where they now lay down in their weariness; the straw which served them for a pillow had drunk the blood of their comrades. Now all was ended; the blood had ceased to flow; the sabres were dried; the dead were dead; these sleepers slumbered peacefully. Such is war. And then, perhaps to-morrow, the slumber of all will be the same.

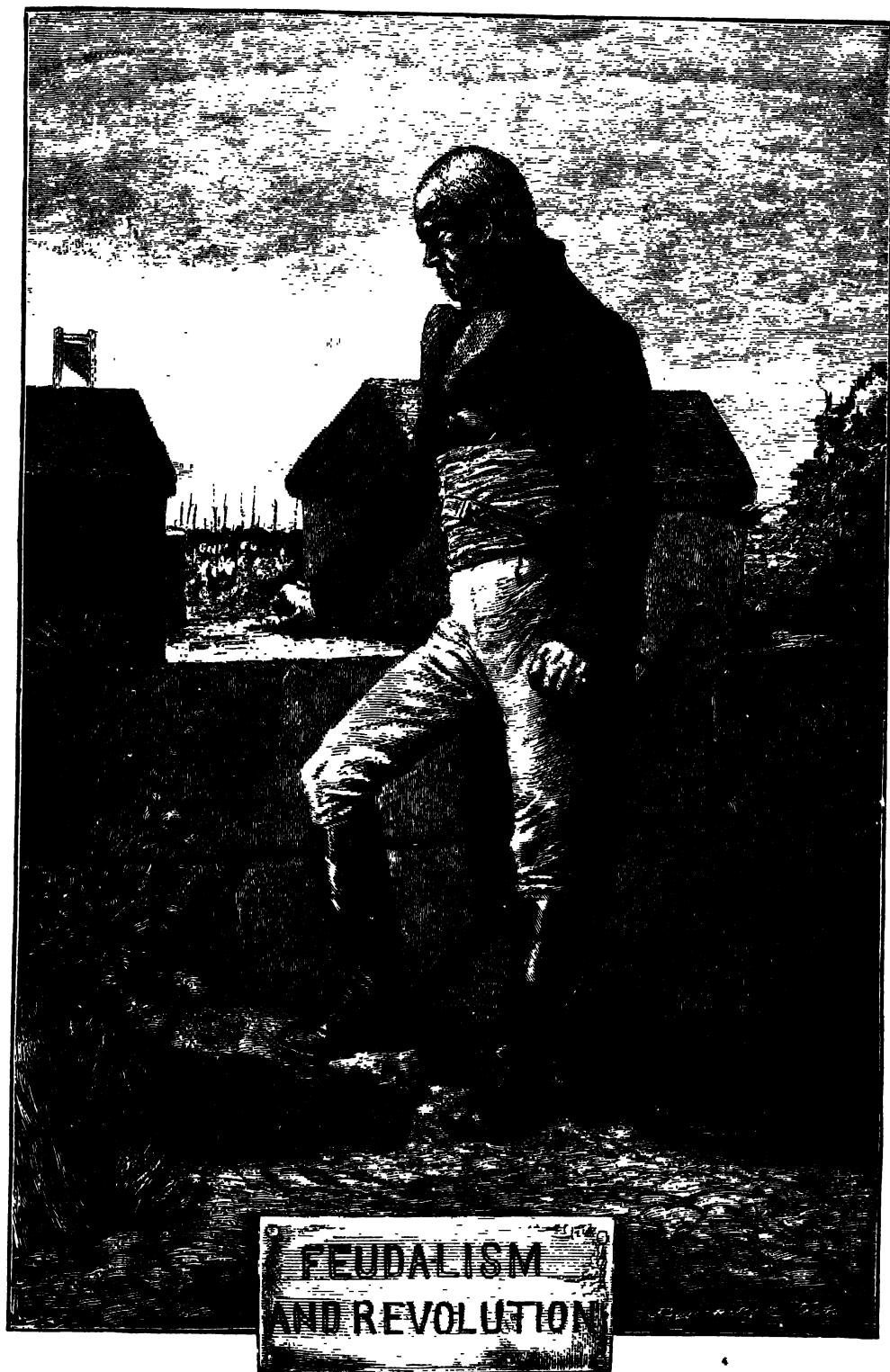
At Gauvain's entrance a few of the men rose—among others, the officer in command. Gauvain pointed to the door of the dungeon.

"Open it," he said to the officer.

The bolts were drawn back; the door opened.

Gauvain entered the dungeon.

The door closed behind him.



FEUDALISM
AND REVOLUTION

BOOK VII

FEUDALITY AND REVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

THE ANCESTOR



LAMP was placed on the flags of the crypt at the side of the air-hole in the oubliette. There could also be seen on the stones a jug of water, a loaf of army bread, and a truss of straw. The crypt being cut out in the rock, the prisoner who had conceived the idea of setting fire to the straw would have done it to his own hurt; no risk of conflagration to the prison, certainty of suffocation to the prisoner.

At the instant the door turned on its hinges the marquis was walking to and fro in his dungeon; that mechanical pacing natural to wild animals in a cage.

At the noise of the opening and shutting of the door he raised his head, and the lamp which set on the floor between Gauvain and the marquis, struck full upon the faces of both men.

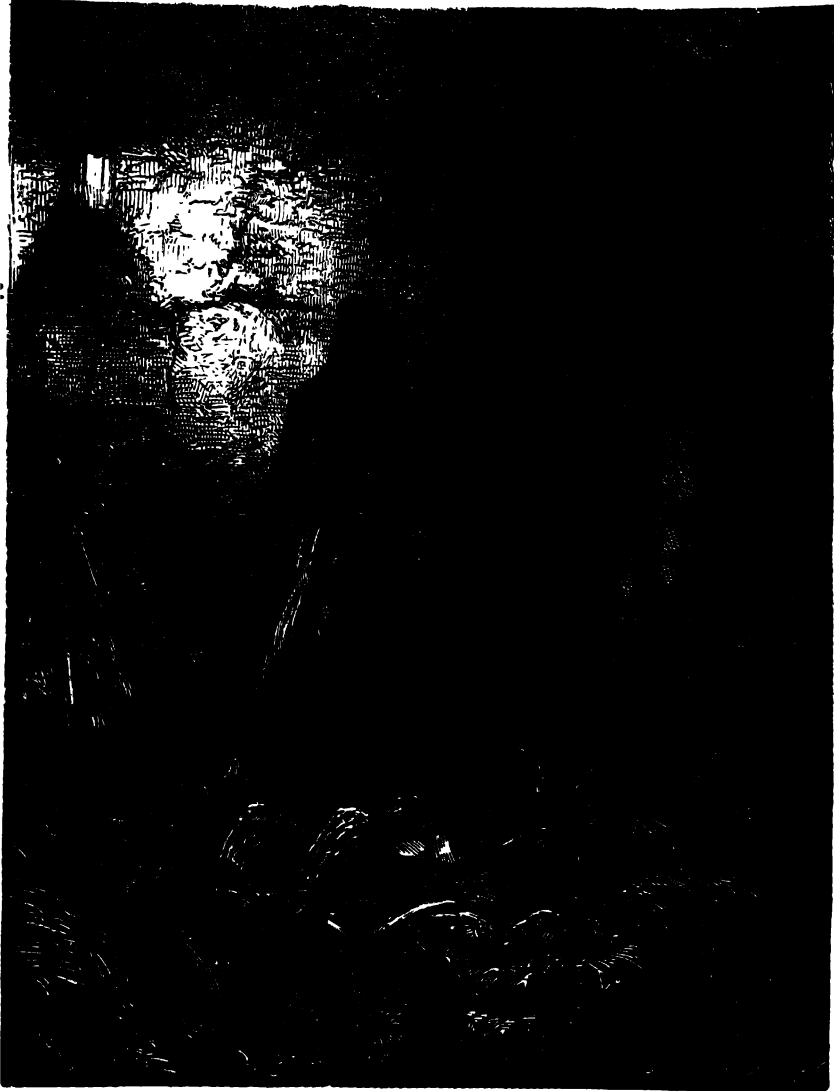
They looked at one another, and something in the glance of either kept the two motionless.

At length the marquis burst out laughing, and exclaimed :

"Good-evening, sir. It is a long time since I have had the pleasure of meeting you. You do me the favor of paying me a visit. I thank

you. I ask nothing better than to converse a little. I was beginning to bore myself. Your friends lose a great deal of time—proofs of identity—court-martials—all those ceremonies take a long while. I could go much quicker at need. Here I am in my house. Take the trouble to enter. Well, what do you say of all that is happening? Original, is it not? Once on a time there was a king and a queen; the king was the king; the queen was—France. They cut the king's head off, and married the queen to Robespierre; this gentleman and that lady have a daughter named Guillotine, with whom it appears that I am to make acquaintance to-morrow morning. I shall be delighted—as I am to see you. Did you come about that? Have you risen in rank? Shall you be the headsman? If it is a simple visit of friendship, I am touched. Perhaps, viscount, you no longer know what a nobleman is. Well, you see one—it is I. Look at the specimen. It is an odd race; it believes in God, it believes in tradition, it believes in family, it believes in its ancestors, it believes in the example of its father, in fidelity, loyalty, duty toward its prince, respect to ancient laws, virtue, justice—and it would shoot you with pleasure. Have the goodness to sit down, I pray you. On the stones, it must be, it is true, for I have no arm-chair in my salon; but he who lives in the mire can sit on the ground. I do not say that to offend you, for what we call the mire you call the nation. I fancy that you do not insist I shall shout Liberty, Equality, Fraternity? This is an ancient chamber of my house; formerly the lords imprisoned clowns here; now clowns imprison the lords. These stupidities are called a Revolution. It appears that my head is to be cut off in thirty-six hours. I see nothing inconvenient in that. Still, if my captors had been polite, they would have sent me my snuff-box; it is up in the chamber of the mirrors, where you used to play when you were a child—where I used to dance you on my knees. Sir, let me tell you one thing! You call yourself Gauvain, and, strange to say, you have noble blood in your veins; yes, by Heaven, the same that runs in mine; yet the blood that made me a man of honor makes you a rascal. Such are personal idiosyncrasies. You will tell me it is not your fault that you are a rascal. Nor is it mine that I am a gentleman. Zounds! one is a malefactor without knowing it. It comes from the air one breathes; in times like these of ours one is not responsible for what one does; the Revolution is guilty for the whole world, and all your great criminals are great innocents. What blockheads! To begin with yourself. Permit me to admire you. Yes, I admire a youth like you, who, a man of quality, well placed in the State, having noble blood to shed in a noble cause, Viscount of this Tower-Gauvain, Prince of Brittany, able to be duke by right, and peer

of France by heritage, which is about all a man of good sense could desire here below, amuses himself, being what he is, to be what you are; playing his part so well that he produces upon his enemies the



effect of a villain, and, on his friends, of an idiot. By-the-way, give my compliments to the Abbé Cimourdain."

The marquis spoke perfectly at his ease, quietly, emphasizing nothing, in his polite society voice, his eyes clear and tranquil, his hand in his waistcoat-pocket. He broke off, drew a long breath, and resumed:

"I do not conceal from you that I have done what I could to kill you. Such as you see me, I have myself, in person, three times aimed a cannon at you. A discourteous proceeding—I admit it, but it would be giving rise to a bad example to suppose that in war your enemy tries to make himself agreeable to you. For we are in war, monsieur my nephew. Every thing is put to fire and sword. Into the bargain, it is true that they have killed the king. A pretty century!"

He checked himself again, and again resumed:

"When one thinks that none of these things would have happened if Voltaire had been hanged and Rousseau sent to the galleys! Ah, those men of mind—what scourges! But there, what is it you reproach that monarchy with? It is true that the Abbé Pucelle was sent to his Abbey of Portigny with as much time as he pleased for the journey, and as for your Monsieur Titon, who had been, begging your pardon, a terrible debauchee, and had gone the rounds of the loose women before hunting after the miracles of the Deacon Paris, he was transferred from the Castle of Vincennes to the Castle of Ham in Picardy, which is, I confess, a sufficiently ugly place. There are wrongs for you! I recollect—I cried out also in my day. I was as stupid as you."

The marquis felt in his pocket as if seeking his snuff-box, then continued:

"But not so wicked. We talked just for talk's sake. There was also the mutiny of demands and petitions, and then up came those gentlemen the philosophers, and their writings were burned instead of the authors; the Court cabals mixed themselves in the matter; there were all those stupid fellows, Turgot, Quesnay, Malesherbes, the physiocrats, and so forth, and the quarrel began. The whole came from the scribblers and the rhymsters. The Encyclopedia! Diderot! D'Alembert! Ah, the wicked scoundrels! To think of a well-born man like the King of Prussia joining them. I would have suppressed all those paper-scratchers. Ah, we were justiciaries, our family! You may see there on the wall the marks of the quartering-wheel. We did not jest. No, no; no scribblers! While there are Arouets, there will be Murats. As long as there are fellows who scribble, there will be scoundrels who assassinate; as long as there is ink, there will be black stains; as long as men's claws hold a goose's feather frivolous stupidities will engender atrocious ones. Books cause crimes. The word chimera has two meanings; it signifies dream, and it signifies monster. How dearly one pays for idle trash! What is that you sing to us about your rights? The rights of man! Rights of the people! Is that empty enough, stupid enough, visionary enough, sufficiently void of sense? When I say,

Havoise, the sister of Conan II., brought the county of Brittany to Hoel, Count of Nantes and Cornouailles, who left the throne to Alain Fergant, the uncle of Bertha, who espoused Alain-le-noir, Lord of Roche-sur-Yon, and bore him Conan the Little, grandfather of Guy, or Gauvain de Thouars, our ancestor, I state a thing that is clear, and there is a right. But your scoundrels, your rascals, your wretches—what do they call their rights? Deicide and regicide. Is it not hideous? Oh, the clowns! I am sorry for you, sir, but you belong to this proud Brittany blood; you and I had Gauvain de Thouars for our ancestor; we had for another that great Duke of Montbazou who was peer of France and honored with the Grand Collar of the Orders, who attacked the suburb of Tours, and was wounded at the Battle of Arques, and died Grand Huntsman of France, in his house of Couzières in Touraine, aged eighty-six. I could tell you still further of the Duke de Landunois, son of the Lady of Garnache, of Claude de Lorraine, Duke de Chevreuse, and of Henri de Lenoncourt and of Françoise de Laval-Boisdauphin. But to what purpose? Monsieur has the honor of being an idiot, and considers himself the equal of my groom. Learn this; I was an old man while you were still a brat; I remain as much your superior as I was then. As you grew up you found means to belittle yourself. Since we ceased to see one another each has gone his own way—I followed honesty, you went in the opposite direction. Ah, I do not know how all that will finish—those gentlemen, your friends, are full-blown wretches! Verily, it is fine, I grant you—a marvelous step gained in the cause of progress! To have suppressed in the army the punishment of the pint of water inflicted on the drunken soldier for three consecutive days! To have the Maximum—the Convention—the Bishop Gobel, Monsieur Chaumette, and Monsieur Hébert—to have exterminated the Past in one mass, from the Bastille to the peerage. They replace the saints by vegetables! So be it, citizens; you are masters; reign; take your ease; do what you like; stop at nothing. All this does not hinder the fact that religion is religion, that royalty fills fifteen hundred years of our history, and that the old French nobility are loftier than you, even with their heads off. As for your caviling over the historic rights of royal races, we shrug our shoulders at that. Chilperic, in reality, was only a monk named Daniel; it was Rainfroi who invented Chilperic, in order to annoy Charles Martel; we know those things just as well as you do. The question does not lie there. The question is this: to be a great kingdom, to be the ancient France, to be a country perfectly ordered, wherein were considered first the sacred person of its monarchs, absolute lords of the State; then the princes; then the officers of the crown for the armies on land and sea, for the artillery, for the direction and superintendence of the

finances. After that came the officers of justice, great and small; those for the management of taxes and general receipts; and, lastly, the police of the kingdom in its three orders. All this was fine and nobly regulated; you have destroyed it. You have destroyed the provinces, like the lamentably ignorant creatures you are, without even suspecting what the provinces really were. The genius of France held the genius of the entire continent; each province of France represented a virtue of Europe; the frankness of Germany was in Picardy; the generosity of Sweden in Champagne; the industry of Holland in Burgundy; the activity of Poland in Languedoc; the gravity of Spain in Gascony; the wisdom of Italy in Provence; the subtlety of Greece in Normandy; the fidelity of Switzerland in Dauphiny. You knew nothing of all that; you have broken, shattered, ruined, demolished; you have shown yourselves simply idiotic brutes. Ah, you will no longer have nobles? Well, you shall have none. Get your mourning ready. You shall have no more paladins, no more heroes. Say good-night to the ancient grandeurs. Find me a D'Assas at present! You are all of you afraid for your skins. You will have no more the chivalry of Fontenoy, who saluted before killing one another; you will have no more combatants like those in silk stockings at the siege of Lérida; you will have no more plumes floating past like meteors; you are a people finished, come to an end; you will suffer the outrage of invasion. If Alaric II. could return, he would no longer find himself confronted by Clovis; if Abderaman could come back he would no longer find himself face to face with Charles Martel; if the Saxons, they would no longer find Pepin before them. You will have no more Agnadel, Rocroy, Lens, Staffarde, Neerwinden, Steinkirke, La Marsaille, Rancoux, Lawfeld, Mahon; you will have no Marignan with Francis I.; you will have no Bouvines with Philip Augustus taking prisoner with one hand Renaud, Count of Boulogne, and with the other, Ferrand, Count of Flanders. You will have Agincourt, but you will have no more the Sieur de Bacqueville, grand bearer of the oriflamme, enveloping himself in his banner to die. Go on—go on—do your work! Be the new men! Become dwarfs!”

The marquis was silent for an instant, then began again:

“But leave us great. Kill the kings; kill the nobles; kill the priests. Tear down; ruin; massacre; trample under foot; crush ancient laws beneath your heels; overthrow the throne; stamp upon the altar of God—dash it in pieces—dance above it! On with you to the end. You are traitors and cowards—incapable of devotion or sacrifice. I have spoken. Now have me guillotined, monsieur the viscount. I have the honor to be your very humble servant.”

Then he added:

"Ah! I do not hesitate to set the truth plainly before you. What difference can it make to me? I am dead."

"You are free," said Gauvain.

He unfastened his commandant's cloak, advanced toward the marquis, threw it about his shoulders, and drew the hood close down over his eyes. The two men were of the same height.

"Well, what are you doing?" the marquis asked.

Gauvain raised his voice, and cried:

"Lieutenant, open to me."

The door opened.

Gauvain exclaimed:

"Close the door carefully behind me!"

: And he pushed the stupefied marquis across the threshold. The hall turned into a guard-room, was lighted, it will be remembered, by a horn lantern, whose faint rays only broke the shadows here and there. Such of the soldiers as were not asleep saw dimly a man of lofty stature, wrapped in the mantle and hood of the commander-in-chief, pass through the midst of them and move toward the entrance. They made a military salute and the man passed on.

The marquis slowly traversed the guard-room, the breach—not without hitting his head more than once—and went out.

The sentinel, believing that he saw Gauvain, presented arms.

When he was outside, having the grass of the fields under his feet, within two hundred paces of the forest, and before him space, night, liberty, life, he paused, and stood motionless for an instant like a man who has allowed himself to be pushed on, who has yielded to surprise, and who, having taken advantage of an open door, asks himself if he has done well or ill; hesitates to go farther, and gives audience to a last reflection. After a few seconds' deep reverie he raised his right hand, snapped his thumb and middle finger, and said, "My faith!" And he hurried on.

The door of the dungeon had closed again. Gauvain was within.

CHAPTER II

THE COURT-MARTIAL



At that period all courts-martial were very nearly discretionary. Dumas had offered in the Assembly a rough plan of military legislation, improved later by Talot in the Council of the Five Hundred, but the definitive code of war-councils was only drawn up under the Empire. Let us add in parenthesis, that from the Empire dates the law imposed on military tribunals to commence receiving the votes by the lowest grade. Under the Revolution this law did not exist.

In 1793 the president of a military tribunal was almost the tribunal in himself. He chose the members, classed the order of grades, regulated the manner of voting; was at once master and judge.

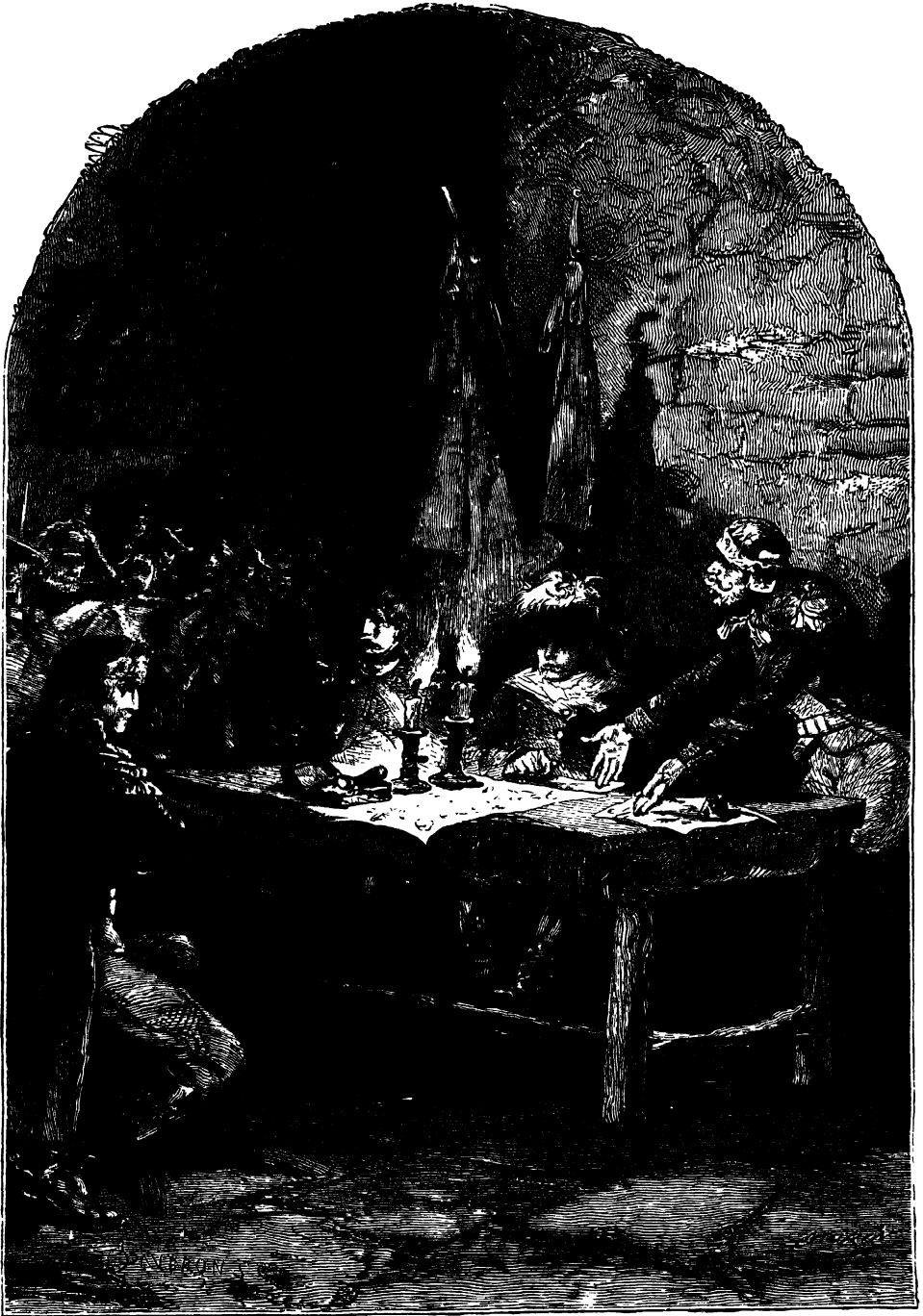
Cimourdain had selected for the hall of the court-martial that very room on the ground-floor where the retirade had been erected, and where the guard was now established. He wished to shorten every thing; the road from the prison to the tribunal, and the passage from the tribunal to the scaffold.

In conformity with his orders the court began its sitting at midday with no other show of state than this: three straw-bottomed chairs, a pine table, two lighted candles, a stool in front of the table.

The chairs were for the judges, and the stool for the accused. At either end of the table also stood a stool, one for the commissioner auditor, who was a quarter-master; the other for the registrar, who was a corporal.

On the table were a stick of red sealing-wax, a brass seal of the Republic, two inkstands, some sheets of white paper, and two printed placards spread open, the first containing the declaration of outlawry, the second the decree of the Convention.

The tri-colored flag hung on the back of the middle chair; in that



THE COURT-MARTIAL.

period of rude simplicity decorations were quickly arranged, and it needed little time to change a guard-room into a court of justice.

The middle chair, intended for the president, stood in face of the prison door.

The soldiers made up the audience.

Two gendarmes stood on guard by the stool.

Cimourdain was seated in the centre chair, having at his right Captain Guéchamp, first judge, and at his left Sergeant Radoub, second judge.

Cimourdain wore a hat with a tri-colored cockade, his sabre at his side, and his two pistols in his belt. His scar, of a vivid red, added to his savage appearance.

Radoub's wound had been only partially staunched. He had a handkerchief knotted about his head, upon which a blood-stain slowly widened.

At midday the court had not yet opened its proceedings. A messenger, whose horse could be heard stamping outside, stood near the table of the tribunal. Cimourdain was writing—writing these lines:

"Citizen members of the Committee of Public Safety:

"Lantenac is taken. He will be executed to-morrow."

He dated and signed the dispatch; folded, sealed, and handed it to the messenger, who departed.

This done, Cimourdain called in a loud voice:

"Open the dungeon."

The two gendarmes drew back the bolts, opened the door of the dungeon, and entered.

Cimourdain lifted his head, folded his arms, fixed his eyes on the door, and cried:

"Bring out the prisoner."

A man appeared between the two gendarmes, standing beneath the arch of the door-way.

It was Gauvain.

Cimourdain started.

"Gauvain!" he exclaimed.

Then he added, "I demand the prisoner."

"It is I," said Gauvain.

"Thou?"

"I."

"And Lantenac?"

"He is free."

"Free?"

"Yes."

"Escaped?"

"Escaped."

Cimourdain trembled as he stammered:

"In truth the castle belongs to him—he knows all its outlets. The dungeon may communicate with some secret opening—I ought to have remembered that he would find means to escape. He would not need any person's aid for that."

"He was aided," said Gauvain.

"To escape?"

"To escape."

"Who aided him?"

"I."

"Thou?"

"I."

"Thou art dreaming!"

"I went into the dungeon; I was alone with the prisoner; I took off my cloak; I put it about his shoulders; I drew the hood down over his face; he went out in my stead, and I remained in his. Here I am."

"Thou didst not do it!"

"I did it."

"It is impossible!"

"It is true."

"Bring me Lantenac!"

"He is no longer here. The soldiers, seeing the commandant's mantle, took him for me, and allowed him to pass. It was still night."

"Thou art mad!"

"I tell you what was done."

A silence followed. Cimourdain stammered:

"Then thou hast merited——"

"Death," said Gauvain.

Cimourdain was pale as a corpse. He sat motionless as a man who had just been struck by lightning. He no longer seemed to breathe. A great drop of sweat stood out on his forehead.

He forced his voice into firmness, and said:

"Gendarmes, seat the accused."

Gauvain placed himself on the stool.

Cimourdain added:

"Gendarmes, draw your sabres."

Cimourdain's voice had got back its ordinary tone.

"Accused," said he, "you will stand up."

He no longer said thee and thou to Gauvain.

CHAPTER III

THE VOTES



AUVAIN rose.

"What is your name?" demanded Cimourdain.

The answer came unhesitatingly—"Gauvain."

Cimourdain continued the interrogatory :

"Who are you?"

"I am Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Column of the Côtes-du-Nord."

"Are you a relative or a connection of the man who has escaped?"

"I am his grand-nephew."

"You are acquainted with the decree of the Convention?"

"I see the placard lying on your table."

"What have you to say in regard to this decree?"

"That I countersigned it, that I ordered its carrying out, that it was I who had this placard written, at the bottom of which is my name."

"Choose a defender."

"I will defend myself."

"You can speak."

Cimourdain had become again impassible. But his impassibility resembled the sternness of a rock rather than the calmness of a man.

Gauvain remained silent for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts.

Cimourdain spoke again :

"What have you to say in your defense?"

Gauvain slowly raised his head, but without fixing his eyes upon either of the judges, and replied :

"This : one thing prevented my seeing another. A good action seen too near hid from me a hundred criminal deeds; on one side an old man : on the other, three children ; all these put themselves between me

and duty. I forgot the burned villages, the ravaged fields, the butchered prisoners, the slaughtered wounded, the women shot; I forgot France betrayed to England; I set at liberty the murderer of our country. I am guilty. In speaking thus, I seem to speak against myself; it is a mistake. I speak in my own behalf. When the guilty acknowledges his fault, he saves the only thing worth the trouble of saving—honor.”

“Is that,” returned Cimourdain, “all you have to say in your own defense?”

“I add, that being the chief, I owed an example; and that you in your turn, being judges, owe one.”

“What example do you demand?”

“My death.”

“You find that just?”

“And necessary.”

“Be seated.”

The quarter-master, who was auditor commissioner, rose and read, first, the decree of outlawry against the *ci-devant* Marquis de Lantenac; secondly, the decree of the Convention ordaining capital punishment against whosoever should aid the evasion of a rebel prisoner. He closed with the lines printed at the bottom of the placard, forbidding “to give aid or succor to the below-named rebel, under penalty of death;” signed, “*Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Column—GAUVAIN.*” These notices read, the auditor commissioner sat down again.

Cimourdain folded his arms and said:

“Accused, pay attention. Public, listen, look, and be silent. You have before you the law. The votes will now be taken. The sentence will be given according to the majority. Each judge will announce his decision aloud, in presence of the accused, justice having nothing to conceal.”

Cimourdain continued:

“The first judge will give his vote. Speak, Captain Guéchamp.”

Captain Guéchamp seemed to see neither Cimourdain nor Gauvain. His downcast lids concealed his eyes, which remained fixed upon the placard of the decree as if they were staring at a gulf. He said:

“The law is immutable. A judge is more and less than a man; he is less than a man because he has no heart; he is more than a man because he holds the sword of justice. In the 414th year of Rome, Manlius put his son to death for the crime of having conquered without his orders. Violated discipline demanded an example. Here it is the law which has been violated, and the law is still higher than discipline. Through an emotion of pity, the country is again endangered. Pity

may wear the proportions of a crime. Commandant Gauvain has helped the rebel Lantenac to escape. Gauvain is guilty. I vote—death.”

“Write, registrar,” said Cimourdain.

The clerk wrote, “Captain Guéchamp: death.”

Gauvain’s voice rang out, clear and firm.

“Guéchamp,” said he, “you have voted well, and I thank you.”

Cimourdain resumed:

“It is the turn of the second judge. Speak, Sergeant Radoub.”

Radoub rose, turned toward Gauvain, and made the accused a military salute. Then he exclaimed:

“If that is the way it goes, then guillotine me; for I give here, before God, my most sacred word of honor that I would like to have done, first, what the old man did, and, after that, what my commandant did. When I saw that old fellow, eighty years of age, jump into the fire to pull three brats out of it, I said, ‘Old fellow, you are a brave man!’ And when I hear that my commandant has saved that old man from your beast of a guillotine, I say, ‘My commandant, you ought to be my general, and you are a true man, and, as for me, thunder! I would give you the Cross of Saint Louis if there were still crosses, or saints, or Louises.’ Oh, there! Are we going to turn idiots at present? If it was for these sort of things that we gained the Battle of Jemmapes, the Battle of Valmy, the Battle of Fleurus, and the Battle of Wattignies, then you had better say so. What! Here is Commandant Gauvain, who, for these four months past, has been driving those asses of Royalists to the beat of the drum, and saving the Republic by his sword, who did a thing at Dol which needed a world of brains to do; and when you have a man like that, you try to get rid of him! Instead of electing him your general, you want to cut off his head! I say it is enough to make a fellow throw himself off the Pont Neuf head foremost! You, yourself, Citizen Gauvain, my commandant, if you were my corporal instead of being my superior, I would tell you that you talked a heap of infernal nonsense just now. The old man did a fine thing in saving the children; you did a fine thing in saving the old man; and if we are going to guillotine people for good actions, why, then, get away with you all to the devil, for I don’t know any longer what the question is about. There’s nothing to hold fast to. It is not true, is it, all this? I pinch myself to see if I am awake! I can’t understand. So the old man ought to have let the babies burn alive, and my commandant ought to have let the old man’s head be cut off! See here—guillotine me. I would as lief have it done as not. Just suppose! If the children had been killed, the battalion of the Bonnet

Rouge would have been dishonored! Is that what was wished for? Why, then, let us eat each other up and be done. I understand politics as well as any of you—I belonged to the Club of the Section of Pikes. Zounds, we are coming to the end! I sum up the matter according to my way of looking at it. I don't like things to be done which are so puzzling you don't know any longer where you stand. What the devil is it we get ourselves killed for? In order that somebody may kill our chief! None of that, Lisette! I want my chief. I will have my chief. I love him better to-day than I did yesterday. Send him to the guillotine! Why, you make me laugh! Now we are not going to have any thing of that sort. I have listened. People may say what they please. In the first place it is not possible!"

And Radoub sat down again. His wound had re-opened. A thin stream of blood exuded from under the kerchief, and ran along his neck from the place where his ear had been.

Cimourdain turned toward the sergeant.

"You vote for the acquittal of the accused?"

"I vote," said Radoub, "that he be made general."

"I ask if you vote for his acquittal."

"I vote for his being made head of the Republic."

"Sergeant Radoub, do you vote that Commandant Gauvain be acquitted—yes or no?"

"I vote that my head be cut off in place of his."

"Acquittal," said Cimourdain. "Write it, registrar."

The clerk wrote, "Sergeant Radoub: acquittal."

Then the clerk said:

"One voice for death. One voice for acquittal. A tie."

It was Cimourdain's turn to vote.

He rose. He took off his hat and laid it on the table.

He was no longer pale or livid. His face was the color of clay.

Had all the spectators been corpses lying there in their winding-sheets, the silence could not have been more profound.

Cimourdain said, in a solemn, slow, firm voice:

"Accused, the case has been heard. In the name of the Republic, the court-martial, by a majority of two voices——"

He broke off; there was an instant of terrible suspense. Did he hesitate before pronouncing the sentence of death? Did he hesitate before granting life? Every listener held his breath.

Cimourdain continued:

"Condemns you to death."

His face expressed the torture of an awful triumph. Jacob, when

he forced the angel, whom he had overthrown in the darkness, to bless him, must have worn that fearful smile.

It was only a gleam—it passed. Cimourdain was marble again. He seated himself, put on his hat, and added:

“Gauvain, you will be executed to-morrow at sunrise.”

Gauvain rose, saluted, and said:

“I thank the Court.”

“Lead away the condemned,” said Cimourdain.

He made a sign; the door of the dungeon re-opened; Gauvain entered; the door closed. The two gendarmes stood sentinel—one on either side of the arch, sabre in hand.

Sergeant Radoub fell senseless upon the ground, and was carried away.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER CIMOURDAIN THE JUDGE COMES CIMOURDAIN THE MASTER :



CAMP is a wasp's nest. In revolutionary times above all. The civic sting which is in the soldier moves quickly, and does not hesitate to prick the chief after having chased away the enemy. The valiant troop which had taken La Tourgue was filled with diverse commotions; at first against Commandant Gauvain when it learned that Lantenac had escaped. As Gauvain issued from the dungeon which had been believed to hold the marquis, the news spread as if by electricity, and in an instant the whole army was informed. A murmur burst forth; it was: "They are trying Gauvain. But it is a sham. Trust ci-devants and priests! We have just seen a viscount save a marquis, and now we are going to see a priest absolve a noble!"

When the news of Gauvain's condemnation came, there was a second murmur:

"It is horrible! Our chief, our brave chief, our young commander—a hero! He may be a viscount—very well; so much the more merit in his being a Republican. What, he, the liberator of Pontorson, of Villedieu, of Pont-au-Beau! The conqueror of Dol and La Tourgue! He who makes us invincible! He, the sword of the Republic in Vendée! The man who, for five months, has held the Chouans at bay, and repaired all the blunders of Léchelle and the others! This Cimourdain to dare condemn him to death! For what? Because he saved an old man who had saved three children! A priest kill a soldier!"

Thus muttered the victorious and discontented camp. A stern rage surrounded Cimourdain. Four thousand men against one—that should seem a power; it is not. These four thousand men were a crowd; Cimourdain was a will. It was known that Cimourdain's frown came easily, and nothing more was needed to hold the army in respect. In

those stern days it was sufficient for a man to have behind him the shadow of the Committee of Public Safety to make that man formidable, to make imprecation die into a whisper, and the whisper into silence.

Before, as after the murmurs, Cimourdain remained the arbiter of Gauvain's fate as he did of the fate of all. They knew there was nothing to ask of him, that he would only obey his conscience—a super-human voice audible to his ear alone. Every thing depended upon him. That which he had done as martial judge, he could undo as civil delegate. He only could show mercy. He possessed unlimited power: by a sign he could set Gauvain at liberty; he was master of life and death; he commanded the guillotine. In this tragic moment he was the man supreme.

They could only wait.

Night came.

CHAPTER V

THE DUNGEON

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THE hall of justice had become again a guard-room; the guard was doubled as upon the previous evening; two sentinels stood on duty before the closed door of the prison.

Toward midnight, a man who held a lantern in his hand traversed the hall, made himself known to the sentries, and ordered the dungeon open. It was Cimourdain.

He entered, and the door remained ajar behind him. The dungeon was dark and silent. Cimourdain moved forward a step in the gloom, set the lantern on the ground, and stood still. He could hear amidst the shadows the measured breath of a sleeping man. Cimourdain listened thoughtfully to this peaceful sound.

Gauvain lay on a bundle of straw at the farther end of the dungeon. It was his breathing which caught the new-comer's ear. He was sleeping profoundly.

Cimourdain advanced as noiselessly as possible, moved close, and looked down upon Gauvain; the glance of a mother watching her nursing's slumber could not have been more tender or fuller of love. Even Cimourdain's will could not control that glance. He pressed his clenched hands against his eyes with the gesture one sometimes sees in children, and remained for a moment motionless. Then he knelt, softly raised Gauvain's hand, and pressed his lips upon it.

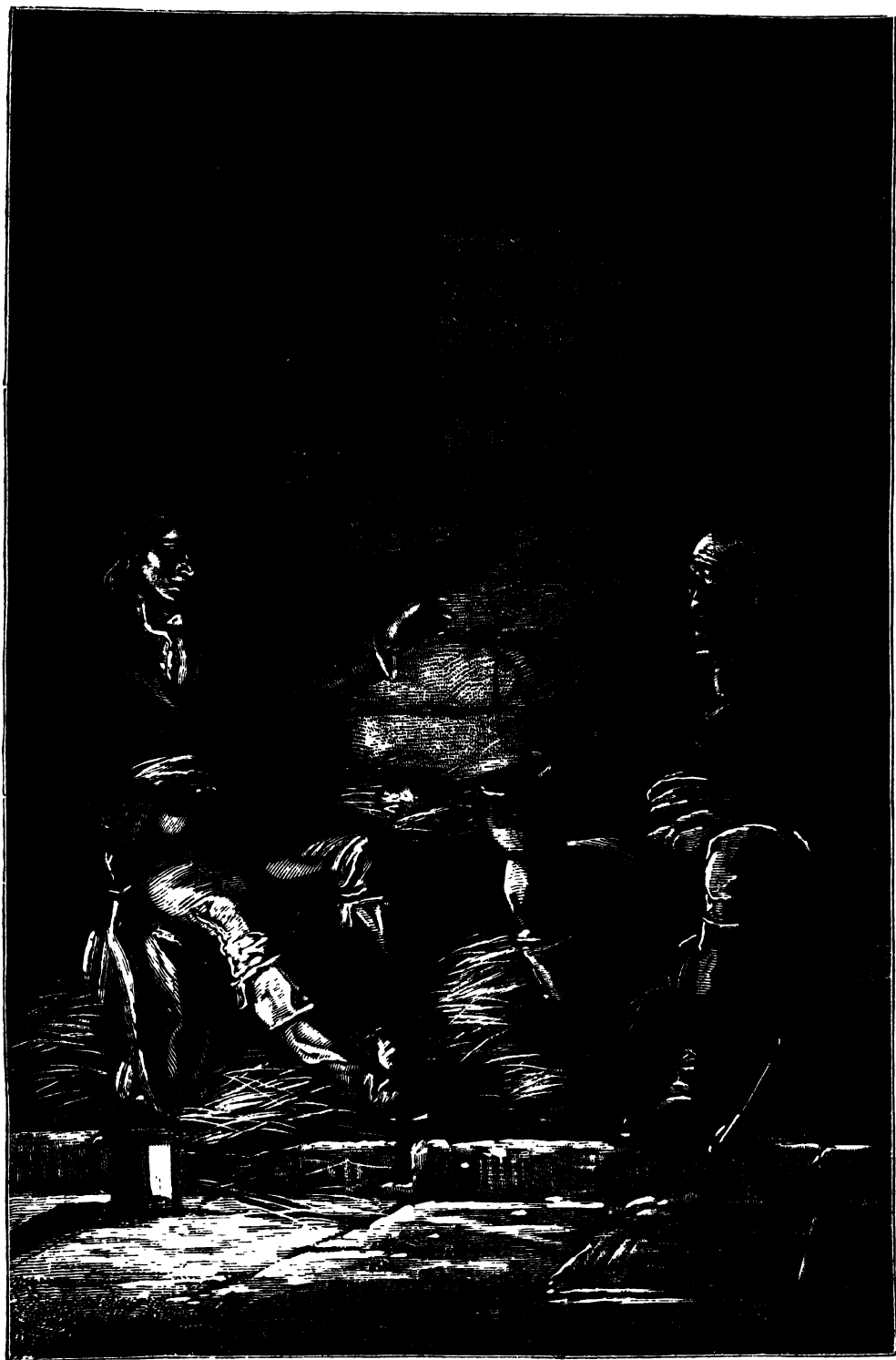
Gauvain stirred. He opened his eyes full of the wonder of sudden waking. He recognized Cimourdain in the dim light which the lantern cast about the cave.

"Ah," said he, "it is you, my master."

And he added:

"I dreamed that Death was kissing my hand."

Cimourdain started as one does sometimes under the sudden rush



THE DUNGEON.

of a flood of thoughts. Sometimes the tide is so high and so stormy that it seems as if it would drown the soul.

Not an echo from the overcharged depths of Cimourdain's heart found vent in words. He could only say, "Gauvain!"

And the two gazed at one another; Cimourdain with his eyes full of those flames which burn up tears; Gauvain with his sweetest smile.

Gauvain raised himself on his elbow, and said:

"That scar I see on your face is the sabre-cut you received for me. Yesterday, too, you were in the thick of that *mêlée*, at my side, and on my account. If Providence had not placed you near my cradle, where should I be to-day? In outer darkness. If I have my conception of duty, it is from you that it comes to me. I was born with my hands bound. Prejudices are ligatures—you loosened those bonds; you gave my growth liberty, and of that which was already only a mummy, you made anew a child. Into what would have been an abortion you put a conscience. Without you I should have grown up a dwarf. I exist by you. I was only a lord, you made me a citizen; I was only a citizen, you have made me a mind; you have made me, as a man, fit for this earthly life; you have educated my soul for the celestial existence. You have given me human reality, the key of truth, and, to go beyond that, the key of light. Oh, my master! I thank you. It is you who have created me."

Cimourdain seated himself on the straw beside Gauvain, and said:

"I have come to sup with thee."

Gauvain broke the black bread and handed it to him. Cimourdain took a morsel; then Gauvain offered the jug of water.

"Drink first," said Cimourdain.

Gauvain drank, and passed the jug to his companion, who drank after him. Gauvain had only swallowed a mouthful. Cimourdain drank great draughts.

During this supper, Gauvain ate, and Cimourdain drank; a sign of the calmness of the one, and of the fever which consumed the other.

A serenity so strange that it was terrible reigned in this dungeon. The two men conversed.

Gauvain said:

"Grand events are sketching themselves. What the Revolution does at this moment is mysterious. Behind the visible work stands the invisible. One conceals the other. The visible work is savage, the invisible sublime. In this instant I perceive all very clearly. It is strange and beautiful. It has been necessary to make use of the materials of the Past. Hence this marvelous '93. Beneath a scaffolding of barbarism, a temple of civilization is building."

"Yes," replied Cimourdain. "From this provisional will rise the definitive. The definitive—that is to say, right and duty—are parallel; taxes proportional and progressive; military service obligatory; a leveling without deviation; and above the whole, making part of all, that straight line, the law. The Republic of the absolute."

"I prefer," said Gauvain, "the ideal Republic."

He paused for an instant, then continued:

"Oh, my master! in all which you have just said, where do you place devotion, sacrifice, abnegation, the sweet interlacing of kindnesses, love? To set all in equilibrium, it is well; to put all in harmony is better. Above the Balance is the Lyre. Your Republic weighs, measures, regulates man; mine lifts him into the open sky; it is the difference between a theorem and an eagle."

"You lose yourself in the clouds."

"And you in calculation."

"Harmony is full of dreams."

"There are such, too, in algebra."

"I would have man made by the rules of Euclid."

"And I," said Gauvain, "would like him better as pictured by Homer."

Cimourdain's severe smile remained fixed upon Gauvain, as if to hold that soul steady.

"Poesy! Mistrust poets."

"Yes, I know that saying. Mistrust the zephyrs, mistrust the sunshine, mistrust the sweet odors of spring, mistrust the flowers, mistrust the stars!"

"None of these things can feed man."

"How do you know? Thought is nourishment. To think is to eat."

"No abstractions! The Republic is the law of two and two make four. When I have given to each the share ~~which~~ belongs to him——"

"It still remains to give the share ~~which~~ does not belong to him."

"What do you understand by that?"

"I understand the immense reciprocal concession which each owes to all, and which all owe to each, and which is the whole of social life."

"Beyond the strict law there is nothing."

"There is every thing."

"I only see justice."

"And I—I look higher."

"What can there be above justice?"

"Equity."

At certain instants they paused as if lightning flashes suddenly chilled them.

Cimourdain resumed:

"Particularize; I defy you."

"So be it. You wish military service made obligatory. Against whom? Against other men. I—I would have no military service. I want peace. You wish the wretched succored; I wish an end put to suffering. You want proportional taxes; I wish no tax whatever. I wish the general expense reduced to its most simple expression, and paid by the social surplus."

"What do you understand by that?"

"This: first suppose parasitisms—the parasitisms of the priest, the judge, the soldier. After that turn your riches to account. You fling manure into the sewer; cast it into the furrow. Three parts of the soil are waste land; clear up France; suppress useless pasture-grounds; divide the communal lands. Let each man have a farm and each farm a man. You will increase a hundred-fold the social product. At this moment France only gives her peasants meat four days in the year; well cultivated, she would nourish three hundred millions of men—all Europe. Utilize nature, that immense auxiliary so disdained. Make every wind toil for you, every water-fall, every magnetic effluence. The globe has a subterranean net-work of veins; there is in this net-work a prodigious circulation of water, oil, fire. Pierce those veins: make this water feed your fountains, this oil your lamps, this fire your hearths. Reflect upon the movements of the waves, their flux and reflux, the ebb and flow of the tides. What is the ocean? An enormous power allowed to waste. How stupid is earth not to make use of the sea!"

"There you are in the full tide of dreams."

"That is to say, of full reality."

Gauvain added:

"And woman? what will you do with her?"

Cimourdain replied:

"Leave her where she is; the servant of man."

"Yes. On one condition."

"What?"

"That man shall be the servant of woman."

"Can you think of it?" cried Cimourdain. "Man a servant? Never! Man is master. I admit only one royalty—that of the fireside. Man in his house is king!"

"Yes. On one condition."

"What?"

"That woman shall be queen there."

"That is to say, you wish man and woman——"

"Equality."

"Equality! Can you dream of it? The two creatures are different."

"I said equality; I did not say identity."

There was another pause, like a sort of truce between two spirits flinging lightnings. Cimourdain broke the silence: "And the offspring? To whom do you consign them?"

"First to the father who engenders, then to the mother who gives birth, then to the master who rears, then to the city that civilizes, then to the country which is the mother supreme, then to humanity, who is the great ancestor."

"You do not speak of God?"

"Each of those degrees—father, mother, master, city, country, humanity—is one of the rungs in the ladder which leads to God."

Cimourdain was silent.

Gauvain continued:

"When one is at the top of the ladder, one has reached God. Heaven opens—one has only to enter."

Cimourdain made a gesture like a man calling another back.

"Gauvain, return to earth. We wish to realize the possible."

"Do not commence by rendering it impossible."

"The possible always realizes itself."

"Not always. If one treats Utopia harshly, one slays it. Nothing is more defenseless than the egg."

"Still it is necessary to seize Utopia, to put the yoke of the real upon it, to frame it in the actual. The abstract idea must transform itself into the concrete; what it loses in beauty, it will gain in usefulness; it is lessened, but made better. Right must enter into law, and when right makes itself law, it becomes absolute. That is what I call the possible."

"The possible is more than that."

"Ah! there you are in dream-land again!"

"The possible is a mysterious bird, always soaring above man's head."

"It must be caught."

"Living."

Gauvain continued:

"This is my thought: Constant progression. If God had meant man to retrograde, he would have placed an eye in the back of his head. Let us look always toward the dawn, the blossoming, the birth; that which falls encourages that which mounts. The cracking of the old tree

is an appeal to the new. Each century must do its work; to-day civic, to-morrow human. To-day, the question of right; to-morrow, the question of salary. Salary and right—the same word at bottom. Man does not live to be paid nothing. In giving life, God contracts a debt. Right is the payment inborn; payment is right acquired.”

Gauvain spoke with the earnestness of a prophet. Cimourdain listened. Their rôles were changed; now it seemed the pupil who was master.

Cimourdain murmured:

“You go rapidly.”

“Perhaps because I am a little pressed for time,” said Gauvain, smiling. And he added, “Oh, my master! behold the difference between our two Utopias. You wish the garrison obligatory, I the school. You dream of man, the soldier; I dream of man, the citizen. You want him terrible; I want him a thinker. You found a Republic upon swords; I found——”

He interrupted himself:

“I would found a Republic of intellects.”

Cimourdain bent his eyes on the pavement of the dungeon, and said:

“And while waiting for it, what would you have?”

“That which is.”

“Then you absolve the present moment?”

“Yes.”

“Wherefore?”

“Because it is a tempest. A tempest knows always what it does. For one oak uprooted, how many forests purified! Civilization had the plague, this great wind cures it. Perhaps it is not so careful as it ought to be. But could it do otherwise than it does? It is charged with a difficult task. Before the horror of miasma, I comprehend the fury of the blast.”

Gauvain continued:

“Moreover, why should I fear the tempest if I have my compass? How can events affect me if I have my conscience?”

And he added, in a low, solemn voice:

“There is a power that must always be allowed to guide.”

“What?” demanded Cimourdain.

Gauvain raised his finger above his head. Cimourdain’s eyes followed the direction of that uplifted finger, and it seemed to him that across the dungeon vault he beheld the starlit sky.

Both were silent again.

Cimourdain spoke first.

"Society is greater than Nature. I tell you, this is no longer possibility—it is a dream."

"It is the goal. Otherwise of what use is Society? Remain in Nature. Be savages. Otaheite is a paradise. Only the inhabitants of that paradise do not think. An intelligent hell would be preferable to an imbruted heaven. But no—no hell. Let us be a human society. Greater than Nature? Yes. If you add nothing to Nature, why go beyond her? Content yourself with work, like the ant; with honey, like the bee. Remain the working drudge instead of the queen intelligence. If you add to Nature, you necessarily become greater than she; to add is to augment; to augment is to grow. Society is Nature sublimated. I want all that is lacking to bee-hives, all that is lacking to ant-hills—monuments, arts, poesy, heroes, genius. To bear eternal burdens is not the destiny of man. No, no, no; no more pariahs, no more slaves, no more convicts, no more damned! I desire that each of the attributes of man should be a symbol of civilization and a patron of progress; I would place liberty before the spirit, equality before the heart, fraternity before the soul. No more yokes! Man was made not to drag chains, but to soar on wings. No more of man reptile. I wish the transfiguration of the larva into the winged creature; I wish the worm of the earth to turn into a living flower and fly away. I wish——"

He broke off. His eyes blazed. His lips moved. He ceased to speak.

The door had remained open. Sounds from without penetrated into the dungeon. The distant peal of trumpets could be heard, probably the reveille; then the butt-end of muskets striking the ground as the sentinels were relieved; then, quite near the tower, as well as one could judge, a noise like the moving of planks and beams; followed by muffled, intermittent echoes like the strokes of a hammer.

Cimourdain grew pale as he listened. Gauvain heard nothing. His reverie became more and more profound. He seemed no longer to breathe, so lost was he in the vision that shone upon his soul. Now and then he started slightly. The morning which illuminated his eyes waxed grander.

Some time passed thus. Then Cimourdain asked:

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Of the Future," replied Gauvain.

He sank back into his meditation. Cimourdain rose from the bed of straw where the two were sitting. Gauvain did not perceive it. Keeping his eyes fixed upon the dreamer, Cimourdain moved slowly backward toward the door and went out. The dungeon closed again.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE SUN ROSE

DAY broke along the horizon. And with the day, an object, strange, motionless, mysterious, which the birds of heaven did not recognize, appeared upon the plateau of La Tourgue and towered above the Forest of Fougères.

It had been placed there in the night. It seemed to have sprung up rather than to have been built. It lifted high against the horizon a profile of straight, hard lines, looking like a Hebrew letter or one of those Egyptian hieroglyphics which made part of the alphabet of the ancient enigma.

At the first glance the idea which this object roused was its lack of keeping with the surroundings. It stood amidst the blossoming heath. One asked one's self for what purpose it could be useful? Then the beholder felt a chill creep over him as he gazed. It was a sort of trestle having four posts for feet. At one end of the trestle two tall joists upright and straight, and fastened together at the top by a cross-beam, raised and held suspended some triangular object which showed black against the blue sky of morning. At the other end of the staging was a ladder. Between the joists, and directly beneath the triangle, could be seen a sort of panel composed of two movable sections which, fitting into each other, left a round hole about the size of a man's neck. The upper section of this panel slid in a groove, so that it could be hoisted or lowered at will. For the time, the two crescents, which formed the circle when closed, were drawn apart. At the foot of the two posts supporting the triangle was a plank turning on hinges, looking like a seesaw.

By the side of this plank was a long basket, and between the two beams, in front and at the extremity of the trestle, a square basket. The monster was painted red. The whole was made of wood except the

triangle—that was iron. One would have known the thing must have been constructed by man, it was so ugly and evil looking; at the same time it was so formidable that it might have been reared there by evil genii.

This shapeless thing was the guillotine.

In front of it, a few paces off, another monster rose out of the ravine—La Tourgue. A monster of stone rising up to hold companionship with the monster of wood. For when man has touched wood or stone they no longer remain inanimate matter; something of man's spirit seems to enter into them. An edifice is a dogma; a machine an idea. La Tourgue was that terrible offspring of the Past, called the Bastile in Paris, the Tower of London in England, the Spielberg in Germany, the Escorial in Spain, the Kremlin in Moscow, the Castle of Saint Angelo in Rome.

In La Tourgue were condensed fifteen hundred years—the Middle Age—vassalage, servitude, feudality; in the guillotine one year—'93, and these twelve months made a counterpoise to those fifteen centuries.

La Tourgue was Monarchy; the guillotine was Revolution. Tragic confrontation!

On one side the debtor, on the other the creditor.

On one side the inextricable Gothic complication of serf, lord, slave, master, plebeian, nobility, the complex code ramifying into customs; judge and priest in coalition, shackles innumerable, fiscal impositions, excise laws, mortmain, taxes, exemptions, prerogatives, prejudices, fanat-icisms, the royal privilege of bankruptcy, the sceptre, the throne, the regal will, the divine right; on the other, this simple thing—a knife.

On one side the noose; on the other the axe.

La Tourgue had long stood alone in the midst of this wilderness. There she had frowned with her machicolated casements, from whence had streamed boiling oil, blazing pitch, and melted lead; her oubliettes paved with human skeletons; her torture-chamber; the whole hideous tragedy with which she was filled. Rearing her funereal front above the forest, she had passed fifteen centuries of savage tranquillity amidst its shadows; she had been the one power in this land, the one object of respect and fear; she had reigned supreme; she had been the realization of barbarism, and suddenly she saw rise before her and against her, something—more than something—as terrible as herself—the guillo-tine.

Inanimate objects sometimes appear endowed with a strange power of sight. A statue notices, a tower watches, the face of an edifice con-templates. La Tourgue seemed to be studying the guillotine. She seemed to question herself concerning it. What was that object? It

looked as if it had sprung out of the earth. It was from there, in truth, that it had risen.

The sinister tree had germinated in the fatal ground. Out of the soil watered by so much of human sweat, so many tears, so much blood—out of the earth in which had been dug so many trenches, so many graves, so many caverns, so many ambuscades—out of this earth wherein had rolled the countless victims of countless tyrannies—out of this earth spread above so many abysses wherein had been buried so many crimes (terrible germs) had sprung in a destined day this unknown, this avenger, this ferocious sword-bearer, and '93 had said to the Old World, "Behold me!"

And the guillotine had the right to say to the donjon tower, "I am thy daughter."

And, at the same time, the tower—for those fatal objects possess a strange vitality—felt herself slain by this newly-risen force.

Before this formidable apparition La Tourgue seemed to shudder. One might have said that she was afraid. The monstrous mass of granite was majestic, but infamous; that plank with its black triangle was worse. The all-powerful fallen, trembled before the all-powerful risen. Criminal history was studying judicial history. The violence of by-gone days was comparing itself with the violence of the present; the ancient fortress, the ancient prison, the ancient seigneurie where tortured victims had shrieked out their lives; that construction of war and murder, now useless, defenseless, violated, dismantled, uncrowned, a heap of stones with no more than a heap of ashes, hideous yet magnificent, dying, dizzy with the awful memories of all those by-gone centuries, watched the terrible living Present sweep up. Yesterday trembled before to-day; antique ferocity acknowledged and bowed its head before this fresh horror. The power which was sinking into nothingness opened eyes of fright upon this new-born terror; the phantom stared at the spectre.

Nature is pitiless; she never withdraws her flowers, her music, her fragrance, and her sunlight from before human cruelty or suffering. She overwhelms man by the contrast between divine beauty and social hideousness. She spares him nothing of her loveliness, neither wing of butterfly nor song of bird. In the midst of murder, vengeance, barbarism, he must feel himself watched by holy things; he can not escape the immense reproach of universal nature and the implacable serenity of the sky. The deformity of human laws is forced to exhibit itself naked amidst the dazzling rays of eternal beauty. Man breaks and destroys; man lays waste; man kills; but the summer remains summer; the lily remains the lily; the star remains the star.

Never had a morning dawned fresher and more glorious than this. A soft breeze stirred the heath, a warm haze rose amidst the branches; the Forest of Fougères permeated by the breath of hidden brooks, smoked in the dawn like a vast censer filled with perfumes; the blue of the firmament, the whiteness of the clouds, the transparency of the streams, the verdure, that harmonious gradation of color from aquamarine to emerald, the groups of friendly trees, the mats of grass, the peaceful fields, all breathed that purity which is Nature's eternal counsel to man.

In the midst of all this rose the horrible front of human shamelessness; in the midst of all this appeared the fortress and the scaffold, war and punishment; the incarnations of the bloody age and the bloody moment; the owl of the night of the Past and the bat of the cloud-darkened dawn of the Future. And blossoming, odor-giving creation, loving and charming, and the grand sky golden with morning spread about La Tourgue and the guillotine, and seemed to say to man, "Behold my work and yours."

Such are the terrible reproaches of the sunlight!

This spectacle had its spectators.

The four thousand men of the little expeditionary army were drawn up in battle order upon the plateau. They surrounded the guillotine on three sides in such a manner as to form about it the shape of a letter E; the battery placed in the centre of the largest line made the notch of the E. The red monster was inclosed by these three battle fronts; a sort of wall of soldiers spread out on two sides to the edge of the plateau; the fourth side, left open, was the ravine, which seemed to frown at La Tourgue.

These arrangements made a long square, in the centre of which stood the scaffold. Gradually, as the sun mounted higher, the shadow of the guillotine grew shorter on the turf.

The gunners were at their pieces; the matches lighted.

A faint blue smoke rose from the ravine—the last breath of the expiring conflagration.

This cloud encircled without veiling La Tourgue, whose lofty platform overlooked the whole horizon. There was only the width of the ravine between the platform and the guillotine. The one could have parleyed with the other.

The table of the tribunal and the chair shadowed by the tri-colored flags had been set upon the platform. The sun rose higher behind La Tourgue, bringing out the black mass of the fortress clear and defined, and revealing upon its summit the figure of a man in the chair beneath the banners, sitting motionless, his arms crossed upon his breast.

It was Cimourdain. He wore, as on the previous day, his civil delegate's dress; on his head was the hat with the tri-colored cockade; his sabre at his side; his pistols in his belt.

He sat silent. The whole crowd was mute. The soldiers stood with downcast eyes, musket in hand—stood so close that their shoulders touched, but no one spoke. They were meditating confusedly upon this war; the numberless combats, the hedge-fusillades so bravely confronted; the hosts of peasants driven back by their might; the citadels taken, the battles won, the victories gained, and it seemed to them as if all that glory had turned now to their shame. A sombre expectation contracted every heart. They could see the executioner come and go upon the platform of the guillotine. The increasing splendor of the morning filled the sky with its majesty.

Suddenly the sound of muffled drums broke the stillness. The funeral tones swept nearer. The ranks opened—a cortège entered the square and moved toward the scaffold.

First, the drummers with their crape-wreathed drums; then a company of grenadiers with reversed arms; then a platoon of gendarmes with drawn sabres; then the condemned—Gauvain.

He walked forward with a free, firm step. He had no fetters on hands or feet. He was in an undress uniform, and wore his sword. Behind him marched another platoon of gendarmes.

Gauvain's face was still lighted by that pensive joy which had illuminated it at the moment when he said to Cimourdain, "I am thinking of the Future." Nothing could be more touching and sublime than that smile.

When he reached the fatal square, his first glance was directed toward the summit of the tower. He disdained the guillotine.

He knew that Cimourdain would make it an imperative duty to assist at the execution. His eyes sought the platform. He saw him there.

Cimourdain was ghastly and cold. Those standing near him could not catch even the sound of his breathing. Not a tremor shook his frame when he saw Gauvain.

Gauvain moved toward the scaffold. As he walked on, he looked at Cimourdain, and Cimourdain looked at him. It seemed as if Cimourdain rested his very soul upon that clear glance.

Gauvain reached the foot of the scaffold. He ascended it. The officer who commanded the grenadiers followed him. He unfastened his sword, and handed it to the officer; he undid his cravat, and gave it to the executioner.

He looked like a vision. Never had he been so handsome. His

brown curls floated in the wind; at the time it was not the custom to cut off the hair of those about to be executed. His white neck reminded one of a woman; his heroic and sovereign glance made one think of an archangel. He stood there on the scaffold lost in thought. That place of punishment was a height too. Gauvain stood upon it, erect, proud, tranquil. The sunlight streamed about him till he seemed to stand in the midst of a halo.

But he must be bound. The executioner advanced, cord in hand.

At this moment, when the soldiers saw their young leader so close to the knife, they could restrain themselves no longer; the hearts of those stern warriors gave way.

A mighty sound swelled up—the united sob of a whole army. A clamor rose: “Mercy! mercy!”

Some fell upon their knees; others flung away their guns and stretched their arms toward the platform where Cimourdain was seated. One grenadier pointed to the guillotine, and cried, “A substitute! A substitute! Take me!”

All repeated frantically, “Mercy! mercy!” Had a troop of lions heard, they must have been softened or terrified; the tears of soldiers are terrible.

The executioner hesitated, no longer knowing what to do.

Then a voice, quick and low, but so stern that it was audible to every ear, spoke from the top of the tower:

“Fulfill the law!”

All recognized that inexorable tone. Cimourdain had spoken. The army shuddered.

The executioner hesitated no longer. He approached, holding out the cord.

“Wait!” said Gauvain.

He turned toward Cimourdain, made a gesture of farewell with his right hand, which was still free, then allowed himself to be bound.

When he was tied, he said to the executioner:

“Pardon. One instant more.”

And he cried:

“Long live the Republic!”

He was laid upon the plank. That noble head was held by the infamous yoke. The executioner gently parted his hair aside, then touched the spring. The triangle began to move—slowly at first—then rapidly—a terrible blow was heard—

At the same instant another report sounded. A pistol-shot had answered the blow of the axe. Cimourdain had seized one of the pistols from his belt, and, as Gauvain’s head rolled into the basket, Cimourdain

sank back pierced to the heart by a bullet his own hand had fired. A stream of blood burst from his mouth; he fell dead.

And those two souls, united still in that tragic death, soared away together, the shadow of the one mingled with the radiance of the other.

THE END

